

Background Paper **Economic Growth Strategy 2026-2036**



City of
Whittlesea

**Whittlesea
2040**

A place for all



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Acknowledgement

We recognise the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledge the Wurundjeri Willum Clan and Taungurung People as the Traditional Owners of lands within the City of Whittlesea.

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Executive summary

The City of Whittlesea is developing an Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 (the Strategy) to guide Council's economic development priorities over the next decade. This background paper brings together the evidence base to inform development of the draft Strategy and to support Executive consideration of proposed opportunity areas.

Strategy development to date has included two stages of consultation facilitated by Urbis Pty Ltd (Urbis). Stage one engaged 67 stakeholders across focus groups and interviews to identify strengths, constraints, competitive advantages and future trends. Stage Two tested themed discussion papers through targeted stakeholder engagement and public consultation via Council's corporate Engage platform, generating clear direction on priority themes and a broad set of practical opportunities to test through the Strategy.

Stage One consultation identified perceived strengths for future growth, including a diverse and rapidly growing municipality, an active small business base, strong stakeholder engagement, a skilled labour pool, and established activity centres and industry strengths. The analysis also highlighted a range of constraints influencing economic development and shaping the municipality's ability to participate fully in the metropolitan labour market. Transport and connectivity limitations, particularly the reliance on car-based travel and gaps that impede efficient access to major employment centres in the northern and wider metropolitan region, affect residents' access to jobs and businesses' access to labour and suppliers. Other identified pressures include rising living and business costs, childcare availability constraints impacting workforce participation, skills gaps (including digital capability), utilities limitations affecting industrial growth, and planning and permit process challenges.

Stage Two consultation reinforced that the four discussion paper themes are the right focus areas for the next 10 years, and that the Strategy should adopt a stronger "how" and delivery focus (clear roadmap, sequencing, responsibilities and measurable outcomes). Stakeholders and the community highlighted the importance of place-based prioritisation, improved investment readiness and planning certainty, stronger alignment of skills pathways to industry needs (including AI and digital literacy), and targeted initiatives to strengthen cultural and place activation. Stage Two also emphasised inclusive employment and cultural safety, stronger support for First Peoples businesses and youth employment pathways, and a clearer economic identity for the municipality.

The jurisdictional analysis of comparable high growth councils identifies consistent lessons and practices that may be relevant to the City of Whittlesea, subject to local context, scale and delivery capacity. These include the value of (1) leveraging competitive strengths to shape a clear economic identity, (2) embedding entrepreneurship, innovation and skills alignment, (3) adopting place-based approaches to centres and precincts, (4) setting ambitious and measurable targets with practical monitoring, (5) strengthening advocacy and role clarity, and (6) keeping strategies concise, staged and accessible.

This paper also recognises that the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022–2026 achieved strong delivery outcomes (including high completion of actions) supported by five Level 3 plans, including the Economic Participation Plan, Destination Plan, Agri-Food Plan, Circular Economy Plan and Investment Attraction Plan. These existing plans and actions provide a foundation to incorporate, update or transition into the new Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036.

Overall, the evidence base points to a clear set of strategic priorities for the next Strategy. These priorities operate at different scales and levels of Council influence. In developing the Strategy, it will be important to clearly distinguish between core economic levers, enabling actions and inclusion or activation initiatives to avoid diluting focus.

- Strengthen state significant precincts and industry clusters by attracting the right industries, improving digital infrastructure, ensuring infrastructure and utilities are in place, and deepening supply chains.
- Build investor confidence through high-quality, sustainable development with clearer approval pathways, earlier guidance and coordination with service authorities in key growth and employment areas.
- Focus investment and local jobs in priority precincts by directing effort to locations with the scale, infrastructure, services and connectivity to support growth.
- Unlock growth through enabling infrastructure and stronger connections by bringing forward critical transport, utilities, energy and digital infrastructure.
- Strengthen attraction and advocacy for priority precincts and enabling infrastructure through a stronger investment story.
- Lift locals spend through vibrant centres and creative enterprise by supporting activation, stronger evening trade and paid opportunities for creatives and makers.
- Connect skills to real jobs and clearer career pathways by aligning training to demand and creating stronger routes into placements, apprenticeships and employment in priority precincts and growth sectors.
- Grow local enterprise through small business and entrepreneurship with connected support to improve skills, systems and performance, grants, and safe adoption of digital tools and emerging AI.
- Unlock shared prosperity through inclusive pathways including social procurement, partnerships, improved local supplier capability and better recognition of existing skills, qualifications and overseas experience.
- Build long-term advantage through sustainable business growth and circular economy by attracting investment, strengthening supply chains and supporting resilient businesses, transition to alternative, more sustainable energy sources.

Collectively, the evidence suggests the Strategy will need to be selective and delivery-focused, concentrating on a small number of place-based and sector priorities where Council can realistically influence outcomes over the next decade.

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea is entering a pivotal period of growth and transition. As one of Melbourne's major growth municipalities, the City of Whittlesea continues to experience strong population growth and rapid change across housing, workforce needs, infrastructure demand, and the structure of the local economy. This changing context requires a refreshed and forward-looking approach to economic development that supports local jobs, business growth, investment attraction and inclusive participation across the municipality.

Whittlesea 2040: A place for all

Whittlesea 2040: A place for all, is Council's long-term vision for the City of Whittlesea. It guides Council decision making, service delivery and partnerships with the community and other stakeholders over time. Council is focused on progressing this vision through five goals, each underpinned by a series of Key Directions.



The Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 will be one of the strategies within Council's Integrated Planning Framework. It will outline Council's commitments, the outcomes Council is working toward, and the actions delivered to support a strong local economy and broader community wellbeing.

Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036

The Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 will build on the direction established under the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022–2026 and incorporate learnings from implementation, including outcomes achieved through Level 3 plans and related operational initiatives. The intent is to provide a clear strategic framework to guide Council's economic development focus and influence over the next decade, supported by a practical approach to delivery, partnerships and performance monitoring.

The Strategy will also address the opportunities and challenges emerging from the consultation process and accompanying analysis. Stakeholder insights have been examined alongside economic data, market trends, and delivery feasibility assessments to ensure that identified priorities are evidence led rather than sentiment driven. This approach informs actions to strengthen investment readiness, enhance skills and workforce pathways, leverage major projects and precincts, and promote inclusive economic participation across the municipality.

Purpose of this background paper

This background paper consolidates the evidence base to inform development of the draft Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 and to support informed prioritisation and decision-making. It has three primary purposes:

1. **Summarise what we heard** from stakeholders and the community through Stage One and Stage Two consultation, including strengths, constraints, competitive advantages, future risks and priority directions.
2. **Integrate lessons from comparable councils** through the jurisdictional analysis, highlighting approaches that are relevant and transferable to the City of Whittlesea's growth context.
3. **Identify opportunities for the Strategy** to consider and test, including place-based priorities, investment readiness improvements, workforce and skills pathways, inclusive employment mechanisms and actions that strengthen the City of Whittlesea's economic identity.

Inputs and methodology

The paper draws on multiple inputs prepared as part of the Strategy development process, including:

- Stage One stakeholder consultation (focus groups and interviews) to establish strengths, weaknesses, trends and opportunities
- Stage Two targeted consultation and public feedback on themed discussion papers, including analysis of Engage survey responses and stakeholder perspectives on what the papers “get right” and what needs strengthening
- Data collection and analysis, including collation and review of relevant economic, demographic and employment data, alongside available local and benchmark information to inform the evidence base.
- Document and policy review, including review of relevant Council strategies, plans and delivery foundations (including Level 3 plans), and a high-level scan of relevant State and Federal policy settings where applicable.
- Jurisdictional analysis of comparable high growth councils to identify transferable lessons for the City of Whittlesea.

How this paper is used

The findings and opportunities in this paper are intended to:

- Inform drafting of the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 by providing a broad set of potential opportunities and initiatives. These opportunities will be subject to further assessment, recognising that only those with the strongest alignment to impact, feasibility and Council's role will be progressed within the Strategy.
- Support development of a delivery approach that clarifies roles (Council as deliverer/provider/partner, funder/enabler, planner, regulator/statutory authority/monitor, facilitator and advocate), sequencing and accountability, and sets measurable outcomes aligned to priority themes.

The paper is intended to support disciplined decision-making by distinguishing between structural economic levers, enabling actions and supporting initiatives.

Supporting detail is provided in the appendices, including Level 3 plan actions and outcomes and other supporting evidence used to develop the Strategy.

Background

The City of Whittlesea's previous Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022-2026 and subsequent thematic plans have provided valuable insights into what enables and limits effective economic development across the municipality. These plans highlighted the importance of clearer strategic focus, stronger integration across related policy areas, more consistent implementation pathways, and closer alignment between long-term aspirations and short-term deliverables.

These learnings inform the direction of the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 (the Strategy), which will provide a single, integrated framework for local investment, industry development, entrepreneurship, precinct vitality and destination development. The Strategy will set Council's economic development direction for the decade ahead, drawing on evidence, community and business input, and practical implementation lessons from earlier strategies.

To ensure the Strategy remains current and actionable, Council will prepare a new two-year action plan aligned to each Council planning cycle. Five successive action plans over the life of the Strategy will translate long-term initiatives into specific actions, milestones and measures, allowing discipline in delivery while enabling adjustments to reflect emerging economic conditions and capacity.

The Strategy will complement broader Council strategies and policies and align with Victorian and Commonwealth priorities where appropriate, supporting coherence between local objectives and wider economic agendas.

Local economic development

While the Federal and Victorian Governments shape the broader economic environment, Local Government plays a central role in place based economic development. Council enables conditions that support business growth, local employment, investment attraction, entrepreneurship, and skills development.

These functions are most effective when delivered in partnership with local stakeholders, including businesses, training and education providers, advisory groups, Chambers of Commerce, learning networks and community organisations. In this context, Council's role is primarily catalytic and enabling, focused on influencing the conditions that allow businesses and workers to succeed rather than directly controlling economic outcomes.

Local economic development involves shaping the local factors that underpin employment, business vitality and investment, such as planning, infrastructure, skills pathways, partnerships and advocacy. It is a collaborative process through which government, business and community partners work to strengthen long-term economic resilience and quality of life.

Although Councils are not legally required to produce an Economic Strategy, doing so supports Council's obligations under the Local Government Act 2020 to promote the social, economic and environmental viability and sustainability of the municipality. Preparing such a Strategy enables the community to identify its strengths, opportunities, challenges and risks, and to set clear priorities for the City of Whittlesea's future economic development.

To complement this overview of Council's role in place based economic development, the image below provides a summary of the six functions Council performs in supporting local businesses, employment pathways, investment attraction and broader economic outcomes. However, there are many others that make a difference in our community, including the Victorian and Australian Governments, private industry, health and education providers, community organisations, clubs and groups.



Deliverer/provider/partner:

Council directly delivers services and infrastructure, either on its own, or in partnership with other levels of government, the community or private organisations.



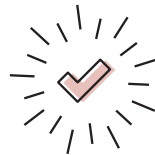
Regulator/statutory authority/monitor:

Council enforces laws, policies and regulations that maintain public safety, health, and wellbeing.



Funder/enabler:

Council provides financial and/or in-kind support to organisations that are better positioned to manage or deliver specific services or infrastructure.



Facilitator:

Council facilitates partnerships, connects stakeholders and ensures that local needs are heard and addressed.



Planner:

Council develops and implements plans that ensure sustainable, well-organised and quality growth and change in the community. This includes land use, housing, transport, town centres, business precincts and community facilities.



Advocate:

Council represents the interests of the community to other levels of government, or other stakeholders. This could involve making the case and negotiating funding, policy changes, or programs that benefit the local community.

Previous Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022-2026

The Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022-2026 (SLES) was the first strategy document developed under the Integrated Planning Framework at the City of Whittlesea. The SLES set the direction for the first five years of work towards realising the Strong Local Economy goal in the community vision, *Whittlesea 2040: A place for all*.

A review undertaken on the SLES found that it was well implemented and saw positive change in the identified outcomes indicators and a suite of five Level 3 Plans was developed. These will be incorporated into the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 and include:

- Agri-Food Plan
- Circular Economy Plan
- Destination Plan
- Economic Participation Plan
- Investment Attraction Plan

The table below summarises key delivery highlights from each Level 3 plan. A comprehensive list is provided in Appendix A.

Level 3 Plan	Action	Outcome
Agri-Food Plan	Deliver mapping of agri-food supply chain businesses to encourage businesses to business interactions and promote the agri-food sector	Identified agri-food businesses for mapping and encouraged business to business interactions to promote and showcase the food and beverage clusters in the City of Whittlesea
	Develop print and digital food and beverage collateral to attract and support new businesses and promote the municipality as the heart of Melbourne's North food and beverage hub	Developed promotional video and brochure to showcase the food and beverage sector and promote the strength of the food and beverage clusters in the City of Whittlesea
	Identify and scope opportunities for supporting start up manufacturers such as a food incubator program	Developed and delivered learning workshops relevant to new/small food businesses in social media and content marketing, cashflow and budgeting for growth, Artificial Intelligence for small business, next level growth and circular business.
Circular Economy Plan	Develop and implement a behaviour change campaign for businesses to learn how to transition to circular principles, with the help of external stakeholders such as education providers	Sponsorship of Melbourne's North Circular Economy Summit hosted by NorthLink - a practical, action-focused event connecting Melbourne's North businesses with circular economy experts, innovative exhibitors and industry leaders to share solutions, build

Level 3 Plan	Action	Outcome
		networks and drive sustainable business growth.
	Connect businesses with opportunities to develop and transform food waste into valuable resources.	A Food Organics pilot program for businesses launched with 12 businesses onboard for the 6-month trial. Insights collected will support educating businesses of the opportunities.
	Inform businesses about grants and funding opportunities that will help them shift their business models to circularity.	The Business-to-Business Grants Program has been expanded to support sustainable initiatives including energy efficiency improvements, waste audits and action plans, and recycling initiatives such as food waste diversion and zero-waste packaging.
Destination Plan	Promote the area as a Destination of Choice for Investment in Accommodation, Trails, Parks and Infrastructure	Launched an enhanced Explore Whittlesea platform with new cultural, heritage and interactive mapping features. This platform provides residents and visitors a centralised location of activities and events to visit and support, as well as promote any Council-related events and activities.
		Promoted new Quarry Hills Regional Parkland trails and delivered updated walking and cycling itineraries, including the Darebin Creek Trail StoryMap and video. This increases awareness and supports active travel within the municipality.
	Develop promotional videos that highlights things to see and do including sites of significance, festivals and events	Produced a suite of three 60-second videos and a longer set for large screens that were filmed across key sites and events showcasing (nature; food & drink; arts/culture/heritage/events). These videos increase awareness and support increased visitation.
Economic Participation Plan	Continue partnership with Hume Whittlesea Local Learning Employment Network (HWLLEN) in the delivery of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment employment initiatives	Supported and promoted the HWLLEN to deliver the Real Industry Jobs Interviews in 2023, 2024 and 2025 with over 1000 students gaining a 'real' job interview situation preparing them for future career pathways each year.
	Support the delivery of a local Job Advocate Service	The service provided more than 8,000 individuals across the City of Whittlesea

Level 3 Plan	Action	Outcome
		with information, advice and referrals to skills, training apprenticeships, support with CV and interview skills and wraparound services such as food and financial assistance, NDIS, migration advice, housing and homelessness.
	Targeted promotion of key Workforce Priority projects to support businesses to employ local jobseekers	Delivered the Workforce Priority Jobs Event in partnership with YPRL Thomastown and Lalor, Melbourne Polytechnic Skills and Jobs Centre, Asuria, Centrelink, and Whittlesea Community Connections. The event drew over 60 attendees seeking information and support on job opportunities in caravan manufacturing, vehicle assembly, NorthEast Link, aquatic and recreational industry projects, as well as starting a business and financial counselling.
Investment Attraction Plan	Implement the Investment Attraction Communications Framework and actively promote opportunities through marketing and communications	Annual plan of promotional and marketing activities developed and implemented including promotional materials, paid advertising, direct marketing and promotional tactics, to support increased engagement and awareness of the City of Whittlesea as a strategic location for business.
	Deliver industry development programs for priority sectors and facilitate and advocate for key activity centres and employment precincts	Delivered a program of industry-focused events, workshops and engagement activities designed to strengthen priority sectors and support local business capability. This included sector-relevant networking, skills development, and partnership initiatives with peak bodies, education providers and industry groups. The program aimed to foster innovation, encourage business retention, and enable stronger connections between local businesses, stakeholders and emerging opportunities within key sectors.
	Actively promote the opportunities of the municipality through Investment Attraction marketing and communications	An integrated promotional and marketing plan targeting key decision makers within priority industries, as well as internal and external partners. The mix includes digital, print, social media and direct to market channels to increase engagement

Level 3 Plan	Action	Outcome
		and awareness of business opportunities within the municipality.
		The City of Whittlesea Business Opportunities explorer online interactive map provides business decision makers and potential investors capacity to easily view planning zones, business parks, transport routes and future opportunities.

In addition to these plans, there were five new, key operational projects that progressed the SLES, with four of these now business as usual and the fifth incorporated into another program. These projects included:

- City of Whittlesea Business Network (ongoing)
- City of Whittlesea Business Awards (ongoing)
- Business Concierge (ongoing)
- Shopfront Improvement Program (incorporated into the Business to Business Grant Program)
- Strengthening Retail Activity Centres (ongoing)

Overall, the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022–2026 demonstrated strong delivery capability and follow-through. However, it was primarily action-focused rather than outcome-led and did not materially shift structural challenges such as the jobs-to-workers ratio. These learnings inform the need for a clearer focus on economic recomposition, productivity and access to opportunity in the next Strategy.

The indicators below demonstrate strong delivery performance and economic activity during the Strategy period, noting that many outcomes were influenced by broader post-pandemic recovery conditions and population growth.

Outcome Indicator	Outcome
Increase in the number of medium and large businesses	From June 2021 to June 2024 [1] 20-199 employees: increase 35.9% 200 or more employees: increase 85.7%
Increase in the number of local jobs	From June 2021 to June 2024 [2] Increase 16.1%
Decreased unemployment rate	Down from 8.2% in June 2021 to 5.0% as at June 2024 [3]
Increased investment in key commercial and industrial areas	From June 2022 to June 2024 change in GRP 'Value Added' Epping: 7.4% increase Thomastown: 5.3% increase South Morang: 6.4% increase Uni Hill: 10.0% increase Mernda: 8.9% increase
Increase value of building approvals, non-residential and residential	From June 2021 to June 2024 23.2% increase (\$1.365B to \$1.6818B) [2]

Outcome Indicator	Outcome
Increased access to library facilities and services	In 2023, 42% of library users attended to study, conduct research or participate in programs, indicating the library's contribution to local learning and skills development [4]
Increased number of local qualified workers in local jobs	The jobs to workers ratio remained stable at 0.66 from 2021 to 2024, indicating consistency in the relationship between local jobs and resident workers during a period of population growth [2]
Increase in enrolment in higher education programs	As of 2021, 20% of the population aged 15-84 were enrolled in tertiary education [5]
Increase in small employing businesses	From June 2021 to June 2024 [1] 5-19 employees: increase 11.4% 1 to 4 employees: decrease 0.7% ¹
Increase local and international export as a share of Gross Regional Product (GRP)	39.42% of headline GRP from exports in 2021 up to 41.42% in 2024 [2]

¹ Note that businesses this size may have grown and are now captured in the category above

Policy context

The policy context outlines the broader legislative, strategic and government frameworks that influence economic development in the City of Whittlesea. Understanding these local, regional, state and federal priorities provides important guidance for shaping the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 (the Strategy), particularly in identifying areas of alignment, influence and advocacy, rather than direct Council control.

Local Government priorities

The diagram below sets out Council’s corporate priority areas and their interrelationships, providing the organisational context within which economic development activity is shaped. These priorities, covering sustainability, liveability, community connection, organisational performance, reconciliation and infrastructure, form part of the broader policy environment that informs strategic decision making across Council.

For the Strategy, they serve as the basis for identifying the elements most relevant to economic outcomes and translating them into targeted economic focus areas. The dot points under each heading therefore highlight the aspects pertinent to economic development, rather than suggesting that all corporate priorities will be progressed equally through this Strategy.

Connected community

- Support education, training pathways and lifelong learning through delivery of suitable facilities.
- Contribute towards a healthy, safe and vibrant community.
- Enhance access to inclusive and culturally appropriate services and facilities.

Liveable neighbourhoods

- Increase amenity to generate investment.
- Attract external investment in our municipality to ensure a diversity of goods and services are available.
- Increase local employment opportunities.
- Support transport and connectivity for our community.

Connected
community



Liveable
neighbourhoods



High performing
organisation



Strong local
economy



**Whittlesea
2040**
A place for all

Sustainable
environment



High performing organisation

- Contribute to local, sustainable and ethical business through our own procurement.
- Equitable, inclusive and transparent recruitment practices and programs.
- Advocate to stakeholders and other levels of Government effectively to attract investment in the municipality.

Sustainable environment

- Support efforts for a climate resilient economy.
- Support the resource recovery sector.
- Support sustainable business practices.

Strong Local Economy

- Connect residents with skills and knowledge for the future.
- Strengthen investment and infrastructure for industry growth.
- Support business growth and innovation.
- Promote vibrant and inclusive economies.

Melbourne's north priorities

Collectively, the below regional priorities provide important context for where Council's advocacy is most likely to unlock outcomes for the City of Whittlesea, particularly where State and Federal decisions on transport delivery, precinct servicing (including energy capacity) and key community infrastructure will shape the readiness and performance of major employment locations such as Epping and the northern growth corridor.

The Strategy should take this into consideration by clearly distinguishing the areas where Council can deliver directly from those where Council's contribution is best focused on coordinated, evidence-led advocacy and partnership work to support timely investment, sequencing and implementation by other responsible agencies.

Local Jobs Plan, Northeastern Melbourne

Partner with local industries to promote inclusive recruitment practices and create pathways for diverse job seekers, particularly where Council has a convening or advocacy role.

Through place-based networks and innovative service models, collaborate with providers to strengthen support systems, deliver upskilling programs, and assist young people and other priority groups to engage in education, training and sustainable employment.

NORTH Link pre-budget submission

NORTH Link is an independent regional association that promotes economic development and liveability outcomes across Melbourne's north, with a strong focus on sustainable industry growth, manufacturing capability and supply chain development. Its priorities provide important regional context for Council's advocacy and partnership work, noting that responsibility for delivery rests primarily with the Victorian Government and external agencies.

In its 2025–26 pre-budget submission, NORTH Link identified several priorities aimed at strengthening economic and social outcomes for the northern metropolitan region. These include:

- Recognition of the Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre as a key economic and employment hub, supported by Victorian Government investment in precinct specific initiatives such as energy grid upgrades, renewable energy opportunities and improved bus connections.
- Additional Primary Health Care funding for the DPV Health Epping Hub, including \$1 million in operational funding to expand community services and \$800,000 in capital funding for a new bulk-billing GP clinic.
- Support for advancing the Wollert rail extension, including engagement with NORTH Link during the Wollert Rail Study, public release of findings and commitment to accelerated delivery and interim transport improvements.

These regional priorities inform areas where Council may adopt a supporting, partnering or advocacy role. Responsibility for funding, planning and delivery rests primarily with the Victorian Government and relevant agencies (e.g., transport, health and energy authorities), with Council's contribution focused on coordinated advocacy, local facilitation and alignment with precinct planning.

Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy

Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy provides a coordinated, 10-year policy and advocacy framework to lift jobs growth and economic opportunity across Melbourne's northern region through targeted public and private investment. It was developed with Victorian Government funding via the Northern Metropolitan Partnership, managed by NORTH Link and supported by the Northern Councils Alliance, in collaboration with the seven northern councils (Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Merri-bek, Nillumbik, Whittlesea and Mitchell).

Northern Councils Alliance (NCA)

Northern Councils Alliance (NCA) is the peak collaborative forum for Melbourne's north, bringing together the Mayors and CEOs of the region's seven councils to advocate, collaborate and deliver initiatives that improve outcomes for residents and businesses.

NCA's policy focus is organised around regional priorities including transport connectivity and access, community health and wellbeing, jobs and skills growth, and regional collaboration, reflecting the shared challenges of rapid growth and the need to lift local employment and service capacity.

Through developing a strong evidence-base and partnering on region-wide projects (including investment attraction work with NORTH Link), NCA provides a coordinated voice to State and Federal Governments to secure the infrastructure, investment and programs needed to support a more connected, productive and inclusive Melbourne's north.

National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA)

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) is the peak advocacy body representing Local Governments in Australia's fast-growing outer metropolitan suburbs. NGAA advocates to Federal (and broader government) decision-makers for policy reform and dedicated investment to address the infrastructure and service gaps that commonly accompany rapid greenfield growth, particularly in transport, community facilities, and enabling services needed to create resilient, liveable and thriving communities.

For Melbourne's north, NGAA provides a wider policy context by positioning outer-suburban growth areas as nationally significant population and housing fronts, and by strengthening the collective case for equitable infrastructure funding and long-term planning approaches that keep pace with growth.

Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA)

Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA) is a regional collaboration of nine councils in Melbourne's north that works collectively on climate mitigation and adaptation, supporting the transition to a zero-carbon society while strengthening community resilience to climate risks.

As part of Victoria's network of greenhouse alliances, NAGA provides a shared platform for councils to coordinate advocacy, share expertise, and deliver joint initiatives that reduce emissions and better protect communities from the impacts of climate change.

This regional approach is underpinned by alliance-wide planning and strategies (including NAGA's strategic planning and regional adaptation work), helping align local action with broader State and Federal climate policy directions while improving consistency and scale across council programs.

State Government priorities

Victoria's Economic Growth Statement

The Victorian Economic Growth Statement outlines the State Government's approach to strengthening economic performance and supporting industry capability, investment and skills development across Victoria. It identifies a broad suite of statewide priorities and initiatives designed to modernise key sectors, attract investment and improve the operating environment for business.

State priority sectors include:

- Advanced manufacturing and defence
- Health technologies and medical research
- Circular economy
- Digital technologies
- Agribusiness

Within this broader agenda, several priority sectors have relevance to the City of Whittlesea's existing assets, workforce characteristics and established precincts. Areas such as advanced manufacturing, health technologies, agribusiness and aspects of the circular economy align with identified local strengths, including the Cooper Street Employment Area, the Northern Hospital and health precinct, and the municipality's agricultural and food production areas. Other sectors, such as digital technologies, function primarily as enabling capabilities that support local business development rather than representing defined local industry specialisations.

Victorian Industry Policy (2025)

The Victorian Industry Policy provides a framework for testing and refining early actions that strengthen industry capability and economic resilience. It focuses on place-based initiatives and targeted programs designed around the assets and challenges of specific locations, to support skills development, foreign investment and commercial innovation. The policy is intended to be practical and iterative. Initiatives are trialled in priority places and sectors, lessons are captured, and approaches that demonstrate value can be scaled or adapted across Victoria.

Key areas of emphasis include:

- Skills aligned to employer demand, including better links between industry and training providers.
- Investment attraction and facilitation, particularly where it accelerates job creation and supply chain growth.
- Commercialisation and capability uplift, helping businesses innovate, adopt technology and scale.
- Precinct and employment-area delivery, bringing partners together around clearly defined local opportunities.

For the City of Whittlesea, the policy's place-based approach has relevance given the municipality's established employment assets and growing workforce. In practice, this provides a platform for targeted pilots that improve workforce pathways into priority roles, attract and support new investment into key precincts, and help local businesses commercialise innovation and connect into expanding supply chains, strengthening local jobs growth while reinforcing the competitiveness of the City of Whittlesea's strategic economic areas.

Plan for Victoria

Plan for Victoria sets long-term housing and infrastructure targets to guide where and how Victoria will accommodate 2.24 million new homes by 2051. It provides a coordinated framework to guide how growth areas like the City of Whittlesea deliver housing alongside transport, jobs, and community infrastructure.

The City of Whittlesea has been assigned a target of 87,000 new homes by 2051, under Victoria's housing targets in Plan for Victoria.

A 10-year plan for industrial land

The Northern region is expected to play a key role in accommodating demand, with growing levels of take-up, future rezoning of precincts including Northern Freight and Merrifield North, and delivery of key supporting infrastructure.

Delivery of the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct (BIP) in the Northern Freight precinct will connect Victoria's intermodal precincts to a national network, from Melbourne to Brisbane via regional Victoria through the Commonwealth's Inland Rail Project, linking local industries to national and global markets.

These settings are particularly relevant to the City of Whittlesea given its concentration of industrial land, freight activity and planned precincts in the northern growth corridor.

Northern State-Significant Industrial Precinct (SSIP)

The Northern SSIP is one of Melbourne's four designated State-Significant Industrial Precincts identified in Plan Melbourne 2017–2050. The Northern SSIP is the second largest in Victoria and covers parts of Hume, Whittlesea, and Mitchell local government areas (LGAs). It provides long-term protection for strategically important industrial land to support freight, logistics, manufacturing, and other largescale, land-intensive industries. It includes the Thomastown and Cooper Street precincts, Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and Somerton.

The Northern SSIP is strategically positioned near the Hume Freeway, Melbourne Airport, and planned Outer Metropolitan Ring transport corridor, making it critical for freight movements and supply chains.

Victoria's India Strategy: Our Shared Future 2025-30

Victoria's India Strategy: Our Shared Future 2025–30 is the Victorian Government's five-year framework for deepening state-to-state and people-to-people engagement with India, with a focus on boosting cooperation across strategically important sectors and priority Indian states.

The Strategy is guided by three objectives: strengthening inclusive connections, enhancing strategic economic cooperation, and deepening education, innovation and technology ties to support a vibrant knowledge economy. It identifies priority areas for collaboration and growth including food and agribusiness, education, digital technology and innovation, tourism, creative industries, sport, and environment, sustainability and energy alongside longer-term opportunities in health and life sciences and manufacturing and engineering solutions.

Victoria's China Strategy: For a New Golden Era

Victoria's China Strategy: For a New Golden Era (2025–30) is the Victorian Government's five-year framework for guiding engagement with China in a complex and dynamic global environment, building on the 2016 China Strategy and positioning Victoria as a national leader for meaningful economic and people-to-people connections. The Strategy is organised around three objectives: REACH (targeted economic engagement to drive growth and prosperity), ATTRACT (strengthening Victoria's reputation as a destination for Chinese visitors, students, researchers and investors), and NURTURE (celebrating and collaborating with Victoria's Chinese community).

It identifies priority action areas that translate these objectives into practical focus sectors and initiatives, including agribusiness, health and life sciences, creative industries and sport, education, the visitor economy, and innovation and investment, alongside community, cultural exchange and Chinese language/capability to support long-term prosperity and social cohesion.

These international strategies provide context for sectoral opportunity and trade engagement, but Council's role is likely to be indirect and focused on facilitation rather than delivery.

Federal Government priorities

Advanced Manufacturing Statement

The Advanced Manufacturing Statement identifies five priority industries that could benefit from advancements in Victorian manufacturing. These include:

1. Zero and low emissions technologies
2. Health technologies
3. Food and beverage manufacturing
4. Defence, aerospace and space
5. Digital and advanced technologies

National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy

Australia's National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy is the nationally agreed, multi-modal framework for coordinated action to improve freight performance across road, rail, ports, aviation and logistics. Endorsed by Federal and State infrastructure and transport ministers in 2019 and refreshed in 2025 following a 2023–24 review, it responds to growing freight demand and recent disruptions by setting a clear reform and investment direction for the sector.

The refreshed Strategy commits governments and industry to four National Priority Action Areas, Productivity, Resilience, Decarbonisation and Data, providing a practical policy anchor for planning, infrastructure prioritisation and system stewardship. It is supported by a 2025–29 National Action Plan that identifies 14 nationally significant actions to be progressed collaboratively, alongside national initiatives such as the National Freight Data Hub to strengthen evidence-based decision-making and performance monitoring.

National Reconstruction Fund (NRF)

The NRF is a landmark Australian Government initiative aimed at revitalising and diversifying the nation's industrial base. Established in 2023 with an allocation of \$15 billion, the NRF seeks to bolster Australia's economic resilience, enhance sovereign capabilities, and foster sustainable growth across seven priority areas:

1. Renewables and low emissions technologies
 - a. Investments in clean energy solutions, including green metals and hydrogen production, to facilitate Australia's transition to a net-zero economy.
2. Medical science
 - a. Support for the development and manufacturing of therapeutic products, aiming to strengthen Australia's health innovation sector.
3. Transport
 - a. Enhancements in transport infrastructure and manufacturing, contributing to improved connectivity and logistics.
4. Value-add in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries
 - a. Initiatives that process primary industry outputs into higher-value goods, supporting sustainable practices and regional development.
5. Value-add in resources
 - a. Investments in refining and advanced manufacturing within the resources sector, reducing reliance on offshore processing.
6. Defence capability
 - a. Strengthening Australia's sovereign defence industrial base through domestic manufacturing of defence products.
7. Enabling capabilities
 - a. Advancements in foundational technologies such as AI, quantum computing, and robotics, underpinning modern industry across all sectors.

While these programs are nationally significant, access is competitive and business-led. The Strategy may wish to focus on enabling local businesses to engage with these programs rather than assuming direct funding flows to the municipality.

Industry Growth Program

The Industry Growth Program is an Australian Government initiative supporting innovative small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to commercialise and scale. It provides tailored advisory services to develop growth strategies and, where suitable, matched grant funding ranging from \$50,000 to \$5 million. The program complements the NRF priority sectors. Eligible businesses must be Australian SMEs with innovative products, processes, or services with strong commercial potential.

Net Zero Electricity and Energy Sector Plan

The Net Zero Electricity and Energy Sector Plan is an Australian Government initiative to decarbonise the energy sector and achieve NetZero emissions by 2050. It aims to increase renewable electricity generation to 82% by 2030, expand transmission infrastructure, and scale up battery storage, wind, and solar capacity.

The Plan supports broader emissions reduction across transport and industry while creating opportunities for renewable energy projects.

National Small Business Strategy

Australia's National Small Business Strategy (2025) is the first nationally coordinated framework designed to strengthen how all levels of government work together to support small businesses.

Developed collaboratively by Federal and State Governments (with stakeholder input), it positions small business considerations more centrally in government decision-making and provides a shared policy platform to improve alignment across jurisdictions.

The Strategy functions as a practical mechanism for coordination, complementing existing State initiatives and informing future policy so that support settings deliver better outcomes for the nation's nearly 2.6 million small businesses. Governance is led through Small Business Ministers as owners of the Strategy, with the Small Business Ministers' Meeting responsible for planning and progressing agreed activities over time.

Overall, this policy context highlights the importance of alignment, targeted advocacy and selective focus. The Strategy should clearly distinguish where Council leads, where it enables, and where it advocates within the broader policy environment.

The importance of strategic partnerships

Strategic partnerships are fundamental to advancing local economic development and promoting inclusive opportunities and strengthening advocacy within the City of Whittlesea and broader region.

By establishing meaningful collaborations with key organisations, including NORTH Link, National Growth Areas Alliance, Northern Council's Alliance, Economic Development Australia, Hume Whittlesea Local Learning Employment Network (HWLLEN), Federal and State Government agencies, such as the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, and educational institutions RMIT University, La Trobe University, Melbourne Polytechnic and Whittlesea Tech School, Council can leverage external expertise, resources, and extensive networks to address multifaceted challenges, influence policy and champion shared objectives.

Such partnerships facilitate the design and implementation of innovative programs and solutions that foster workforce advancement, business innovation, and sustainable growth. The creation of strategic partnerships significantly enhances the capacity to provide targeted services, attract investment, and respond proactively to the evolving needs of the community and broader northern region.

The benefits of these collaborations improve access to education, training, and employment pathways for diverse and priority cohorts, increased resilience and competitiveness among local businesses and aligned advocacy. Through coordinated advocacy and action, strategic partners contribute to positive outcomes, ensuring that the region remains agile, influential and prosperous within a dynamic economic environment.

Municipal profile

The City of Whittlesea is a large and rapidly expanding local government area in Melbourne's northern suburbs and forms a key part of Melbourne's northern growth and labour market corridor. Located approximately 20 kilometres from Melbourne CBD, it covers around 490 square kilometres, making it one of the largest LGAs in metropolitan Melbourne. Approximately 60 per cent of this area remains rural, with the remainder urbanised across both established and emerging suburbs. Major established localities include Epping, South Morang, Mernda, Mill Park, Thomastown, Lalor, Doreen and parts of Bundoora, with Wollert and Donnybrook identified as key emerging growth areas. [6]

The City of Whittlesea is among Australia's fastest-growing municipalities. The estimated resident population is 268,944 in 2026, and strong annual growth is expected to continue. Forecasts indicate population growth of around 33 per cent over the next decade, reaching approximately 359,000 residents by 2036. [7]

The community is youthful and diverse. Key characteristics include:

- A median age of around 34 years, lower than state and national average [6]
- A significant culturally and linguistically diverse community, with almost half of residents speaking a language other than English at home [6]
- One of the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations among metropolitan Melbourne councils, highlighting the importance of inclusive economic participation and culturally appropriate engagement [8]
- A high proportion of family households, particularly couples with children [6]

A detailed table highlighting the municipal profile is provided in Appendix B.

Economy and Employment

The City of Whittlesea's economy is broad and growing, supported by residential development, population servicing industries and an expanding range of service sectors, with future growth increasingly shaped by productivity, skills and access to metropolitan employment. Gross Regional Product (GRP) was approximately \$12.21 billion in 2024, with around 85,000 local jobs across diverse industries. Major employment sectors include health care and social assistance, retail trade, construction and manufacturing. More than 22,000 local businesses operate in the municipality, many of which are small enterprises serving local and regional markets. [2]

Although the municipality supports a substantial number of jobs and businesses, a significant share of residents work outside the local government area (LGA). Based on the most recent journey to work data, approximately 63% of employed residents commute to jobs beyond the municipality [6], reinforcing the importance of reliable transport connectivity and efficient access to the wider metropolitan labour market for both residents and employers improving. Despite strong growth, parts of the municipality experience ongoing challenges. The City of Whittlesea is among the more socio-economically disadvantaged metropolitan LGAs in Victoria, with a notable proportion of low-income households [6]. Local planning and economic strategies therefore place emphasis on expanding employment opportunities, improving enabling infrastructure and strengthening participation across all community groups.

The City of Whittlesea's location provides access to Melbourne's broader transport network, and rail and road connections continue to expand alongside residential growth [6]. However, the prevalence of outbound commuting highlights the continuing need to improve connectivity to support both resident workers and local businesses.

Implications for the Strategy

The scale and pace of population growth have important economic implications. Continued expansion will increase pressure on jobs accessibility, highlighting the need to grow employment opportunities closer to where people live and to maintain efficient links to major employment centres. Growth also underscores the importance of timely and coordinated infrastructure sequencing, particularly transport, utilities and community infrastructure, to support business activity and labour mobility as new communities form.

In addition, increased population will shape workforce participation, including demand for childcare, training pathways and services that support residents to enter and remain in the labour market. These factors collectively frame the economic context within which the Strategy will prioritise its focus and actions.

Economic context

The City of Whittlesea in Melbourne's Economy

The City of Whittlesea's economy operates as part of Melbourne's northern labour, freight and services system, with strong daily movement of workers, goods and services across municipal boundaries.

The local jobs-to-worker ratio is 0.66, meaning there are roughly two local jobs for every three resident workers. More than 67,000 residents, or 62.9% of the workforce, travel outside the municipality for work. Of these, around 13,600 people, or 12.7% of resident workers, commute to the City of Melbourne. At the same time, more than half of all jobs located in the City of Whittlesea (34,593 roles or 50.5%), are filled by workers who live outside the municipality, primarily in adjacent LGAs. [2]

This pattern reflects the City of Whittlesea's structural role within the metropolitan labour market. Economic outcomes for residents therefore depend not only on the number of jobs located within the municipality, but also on access to employment across Melbourne through transport connectivity, skills alignment and workforce pathways.

Sectoral commuting and job quality

Sector-level data reinforces this metropolitan integration, particularly in higher-skill and higher-income industries.

In financial and insurance services, 62% of City of Whittlesea residents work in jobs located in the City of Melbourne. Only 18% of residents employed in this sector work locally, with the remainder dispersed across inner and outer LGAs. [2]

A similar pattern is evident in professional, scientific and technical services. Around 34% of residents employed in this sector work in jobs located in the City of Melbourne, compared with 24% working locally. The remainder are spread across surrounding LGAs, reflecting the metropolitan geography of professional employment. [2]

Together, these patterns show that access to knowledge-intensive employment for the City of Whittlesea residents is structurally tied to metropolitan job markets. For these sectors, economic development outcomes are shaped by connectivity, skills portability and career progression pathways as much as by the availability of local employment.

Population growth and labour market pressure

The City of Whittlesea is one of Australia's fastest-growing municipalities, with population forecast to increase by around 33% by 2036 [2]. In high-growth contexts, economic development is not primarily about aggregate job creation. It is about ensuring residents can access jobs that match their skills, support household incomes, and are accessible as the population grows.

If job growth, skills pathways and transport access do not keep pace with population growth, outcomes worsen rather than improve, with longer commutes, higher under-employment and lower participation, particularly in northern growth areas.

Industry structure and economic resilience

The City of Whittlesea economy is anchored by health care and social assistance, manufacturing, logistics, retail and construction. Health and population-servicing sectors provide relative stability through economic cycles, while logistics, food-related manufacturing and freight-linked activity connect the City of Whittlesea directly into state and national supply chains.

Major assets such as the Northern Hospital precinct, the Melbourne Wholesale Market, established industrial areas, and the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct position the municipality as a critical employment and distribution hub in Melbourne's north. These strengths support continued employment growth but also place pressure on enabling infrastructure, particularly transport, utilities and energy capacity.

Productivity, skills and economic recomposition

Even with a growing labour force, the City of Whittlesea cannot rely on employment growth alone to lift incomes and output; gains will increasingly come from higher-skilled roles, better use of technology and productivity improvements within existing industries.

For the City of Whittlesea, economic recomposition means lifting the quality and value of work within existing industries rather than attempting to attract entirely new sectors. In practical terms, this includes supporting higher-skilled and higher-paid roles in health, logistics, manufacturing and construction; embedding digital and technical capability across small and medium enterprises; and improving management, automation and process efficiency in labour-intensive sectors.

Skills and training are central to this shift. While the municipality has a large and growing labour force, consultation highlighted persistent skills mismatches, particularly in technical, digital and supervisory roles, across manufacturing, logistics and service sectors. Better alignment between local employers, training providers and education institutions is required to ensure residents can move into higher-value roles as industries evolve. This includes clearer pathways from school to vocational and higher education, applied training linked to real jobs, and upskilling for existing workers.

Without a focus on productivity and skills progression, employment growth risks concentrating in lower-paid or insecure roles, limiting gains in household incomes and participation. By contrast, targeted investment in skills, technology adoption and workforce capability can lift output and incomes without relying on continued labour force expansion.

This reinforces the need for the Strategy to prioritise skills alignment, workforce progression and productivity improvement as core economic levers, alongside more traditional employment and investment measures.

Infrastructure, energy and enabling capacity

Transport connectivity, grid capacity, utilities provision and planning certainty are increasingly core constraints on industrial and employment land development. These factors directly influence investment timing, business expansion and the competitiveness of employment precincts.

For the City of Whittlesea, economic development outcomes are therefore closely linked to infrastructure sequencing, coordinated planning and targeted advocacy, particularly in precincts associated with freight, health services and advanced manufacturing.

Implications for the Economic Growth Strategy

This context suggests the Strategy should:

- recognise access to jobs across metropolitan Melbourne as a legitimate economic development outcome
- prioritise job quality, participation and productivity alongside employment growth
- focus on a limited number of sectors and precincts where the City of Whittlesea has structural advantage
- clearly distinguish between what Council can directly deliver, what it can enable, and what it must advocate for

Macroeconomic trends

Global growth is expected to remain below pre-pandemic averages through the late 2020s, with downside risks from trade tensions, climate impacts and high debt. At the same time, the economy is changing as electrification accelerates, critical minerals become more constrained, and climate hazards intensify. These trends provide context rather than forecasts and are intended to inform strategic judgement rather than predict local outcomes.

For the City of Whittlesea, these shifts are likely to influence energy costs and reliability, supply chain and investment patterns, expectations for climate-resilient precincts, and demand for digital and technical skills, particularly across manufacturing, logistics and health related.

Growth and fragmentation

Major international institutions anticipate weaker global growth and higher uncertainty linked to trade policy, tariffs and broader geoeconomic fragmentation. [9] [10] [11]

In the City of Whittlesea, this can affect local businesses through more variable input costs, lead times and compliance requirements. It also increases the relative importance of sectors that are less sensitive to economic cycles, such as health services and everyday food manufacturing, where the municipality has strengths through the Northern Hospital precinct and established food and logistics activity linked to the Melbourne Market and Cooper Street employment areas.

Energy transition & grid capacity

The energy transition is accelerating, with electricity demand rising as more sectors electrify and digital systems become integral to business operations. Global bodies such as the International Energy Agency highlight increasing clean energy investment alongside persistent risks to energy security stemming from geopolitical disruptions and extreme weather impacts on infrastructure. [12]

For the City of Whittlesea, these shifts have practical implications for local growth and industry development. Grid capacity and network reliability influence the timing and feasibility of development within key precincts and the ability of businesses to expand. Council's role in this context is primarily one of planning, coordination and advocacy, ensuring energy capacity considerations are embedded in precinct planning, engaging with responsible agencies on network requirements, and supporting policy settings that enable industry and developers to adopt suitable energy solutions. While options such as embedded networks, onsite storage and demand management approaches may help reduce exposure to supply constraints, Council's contribution is to facilitate and advocate rather than to deliver these measures directly.

Critical minerals & circular materials

Supply chains for critical materials used in modern technologies are tightening, increasing volatility and strengthening the case for circular economy solutions such as recovery, recycling and remanufacturing to reduce exposure to supply risk. Analysis suggests potential future supply gaps for key inputs in higher ambition- scenarios. [13]

In the City of Whittlesea, there is a clear link to the municipality's resource recovery base and manufacturing capability, including potential opportunities to expand higher value recovery (such as packaging and emerging battery-related streams) and connect recovered inputs into local production.

Climate hazards & adaptation

Victoria's climate projections show warmer averages, more frequent heatwaves, drier cool seasons, and more intense short duration rainfall, with growing impacts on infrastructure, health and insurance costs, underscoring the need for stronger adaptation investment and climate resilient urban design. [14] [15]

This is particularly relevant for the municipality's industrial and mixed-use precincts and growth areas, where heat and flood risk can affect business continuity and community wellbeing. This supports continued emphasis on resilient precinct design, water sensitive urban design, shade and canopy, cool materials, and adequate drainage capacity, using VCP24 (Victorian Climate Projection) suburb scale indicators in assessment and prioritisation.

Trade, freight & connectivity

Trade and investment decisions are increasingly shaped by strategic and security considerations, with supply chains re-anchoring and logistics performance becoming a stronger location factor. [10]

City of Whittlesea's role in freight, distribution and manufacturing means connectivity and network efficiency directly influence competitiveness. Transport upgrades and freight network performance therefore remain important to supporting the municipality's employment precincts and export-linked activity associated with the Melbourne Market and broader industrial areas.

This reinforces the strategic importance of the City of Whittlesea's freight and employment precincts within Melbourne's northern economic corridor.

Skills, digitalisation & productivity

Digital tools, including AI, can lift productivity, but outcomes depend on practical adoption, process change and workforce capability. Evidence shows rapid uptake, while research notes broader gains depend on diffusion and meaningful task redesign. [16] [17]

The economic benefits of AI and other digital tools depend less on who adopts them first and more on how widely they are taken up across the economy, whether people have the skills to use them, and whether work processes are redesigned to make the most of them. When adoption is widespread, productivity and competitiveness improve. When adoption is uneven, the overall gains are smaller and the gap between stronger and weaker businesses grows.

Energy prices & business costs

Default electricity prices for 2025–26 rose modestly due to wholesale and network cost drivers, and regulators continue to encourage offer comparison and efficiency measures. [18]

For City of Whittlesea businesses, particularly energy intensive manufacturing and logistics, energy cost volatility remains a competitiveness issue, strengthening the case for practical cost-management actions such as efficiency upgrades.

Overall, these macroeconomic trends highlight increasing volatility, infrastructure constraints and skills demands. For the Strategy, the implication is not to respond to every trend, but to prioritise those most relevant to the City of Whittlesea's economic structure and Council's role.

Employment precincts and future growth

The municipality includes established employment precincts and planned growth areas that will influence jobs, investment and land use over the next decade. This section summarises key precincts and known or planned developments relevant to Strategy planning.

The intent is not to catalogue all projects, but to identify precincts that materially influence employment capacity, investment attraction, infrastructure demand and sequencing over the Strategy period.

Current employment precincts

Epping

Primary economic role

Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre (Epping MAC) and the Northern State Significant Industrial Area (SSIP) has a strong core of established commercial, industrial and retail offerings, a major critical health cluster and home to the Melbourne Market, as well as strong logistics offerings. Furthermore, Epping is recognised by State Government as an area of significant growth for employment, new housing, services and entertainment.

Epping Central bridges the City of Whittlesea's established southern suburbs such as Thomastown, Lalor, Bundoora, South Morang, and Mill Park, with the expanding northern growth corridor, including Epping North, Wollert, and Donnybrook. Easy access to industrial land to the west further enhances its appeal for business and investment.

Epping Renewal Precinct is currently underway and will revitalise and transform a substantial 51-hectare site within the Epping activity centre, establishing a mixed-use community that will integrate residential, commercial, healthcare, and convenience retail spaces.

Scale and maturity

Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre (Epping MAC) and the Northern State Significant Industrial Area (SSIP) represent a mature and established economic hub with a strong base of commercial, industrial, retail and health-cluster activity. Their scale is reinforced by major institutional anchors—including Melbourne Market, Northern Hospital and significant logistics assets—supporting an already diverse employment base that continues to intensify.

Epping Central is a well-established activity centre with substantial infrastructure maturity, supported by direct access to key arterials, public transport, and proximity to the region's largest health and education institutions. Its role as the connector between established southern suburbs and the rapidly expanding northern corridor highlights its ongoing evolution into a high-access, mixed-use destination with growing commercial and employment activity.

Epping Renewal Precinct is an emerging mixed-use district transitioning from early-stage redevelopment to a maturing precinct anchored by major health and commercial investments. The 51-hectare redevelopment is reshaping the area into a long-term employment, health and knowledge precinct, supported by significant new assets including the Northern Private Hospital and broader health-wellness cluster.

Key constraints or enablers

Epping is recognised by State Government as an area of significant growth for employment, new housing, services and entertainment. Strategically located 20kms from Melbourne CBD, with direct access to major freight and travel routes, Melbourne Airport, the Port of Melbourne and the agricultural producing regions of Victoria and the northern states.

Current constraints include the delay in the activation of the Epping-Wollert rail corridor which would facilitate movement of residents down to the employment precinct of Epping and beyond. The State Government has a desire to increase housing density in Epping by 16,000 homes. These homes will be achieved through 4 to 12-storey apartment buildings, however currently it is not economically justifiable to build the higher density apartments, until such time as property prices increase.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026-2036

Epping functions as one of the municipality's most significant engines of economic growth, driven by its concentration of employment, health, education, retail and logistics activity. Its strong commercial and industrial base, anchored by major operators, established health institutions and well-developed logistics infrastructure, positions Epping as a key location for sustained job creation and investment attraction over the next decade.

The area's strategic connectivity, linking established suburbs with fast-growing northern communities and providing direct access to key transport corridors, Melbourne Airport and the Port of Melbourne, supports ongoing expansion in retail, entertainment, education and health services. Continued redevelopment and mixed-use evolution within Epping will strengthen long-term economic capacity, diversify employment opportunities and enhance resilience. Collectively, Epping's assets and growth trajectory make it a central pillar of the Strategy, underpinning priority sector development, workforce access, and future-facing investment across the municipality.

Cooper Street and O'Herns Road Employment Precinct

Primary economic role

This precinct is a major employment hub anchored by large-scale logistics, food and beverage manufacturing, medical/allied services, and transport and logistics. It includes major institutions such as the Melbourne Wholesale Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Market and supporting strong industry clustering.

Scale and maturity

The precinct is highly advanced in its development trajectory, with capacity to support more than 25,000 jobs. It benefits from exceptional transport connectivity via the Hume Freeway and multiple interchanges at Cooper Street, Edgars Road and O'Herns Road, making it one of the municipality's most mature industrial corridors.

Key constraints or enablers

Key enablers include its established infrastructure, diverse business mix, proximity to residential growth areas and high-amenity employment environments. Constraints include limited access to public transport (non-activation of the Epping-Wollert Rail corridor), and limited industrial land availability beyond the medium term for future development.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

The precinct is considered a Tier 1 priority for active Strategy focus, given its immediate job creation potential, substantial private investment pipeline and strong levers for Council action.

Cooper Street West and Southwest Employment Precinct

Primary economic role

This precinct plays a dual role as a state-significant hub for waste and resource recovery and as a growing industrial and logistics precinct supported by continuing private investment.

Scale and maturity

The area features large, well-established businesses and is progressively unlocking additional industrial land. Major developments demonstrate significant scale, with building footprints ranging from 5,000 to 30,000 sqm across multiple stages.

Key constraints or enablers

Intensifying industrial activity across Cooper Street West and Southwest is increasing land-use conflict, particularly where state-significant waste and resource recovery operations interface with large-format developments such as 410 Cooper Street estate and Biodiversity Park. These uses generate amenity pressures, including higher heavy-vehicle movements, noise and visual impacts. Despite these constraints, strong freight connectivity and substantial committed private development remain key enablers of long-term economic growth.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

Its ongoing expansion positions it as a key logistics and industrial growth engine, complementing the broader Cooper Street corridor. It is a significant contributor to job creation opportunities over the Strategy period.

Vearings Road Employment Precinct

Primary economic role

Vearings Road represents one of the municipality's most substantial future industrial growth areas, strategically positioned for logistics, manufacturing and advanced industrial activity due to its freeway adjacency.

Scale and maturity

The precinct comprises 140 hectares of industrial land, with development progressing in a multi-stage program over the next decade. Early stages are geared toward large-format facilities (up to 20,000 sqm), with later stages delivering smaller, flexible industrial spaces.

Key constraints or enablers

Key risks for the Vearings Road Employment Precinct relate to servicing, staging and workforce access, given its heavy reliance on the Hume Freeway and the substantial infrastructure required to support development. The absence of public transport connectivity presents a significant workforce-access constraint, increasing dependence on private vehicle travel and limiting labour catchment.

Staged delivery of utilities and road upgrades will be essential to enable orderly development across the precinct's 140-hectare industrial land footprint, which represents one of the municipality's largest long-term employment land opportunities. Despite these challenges, strong freeway access remains a key enabler for logistics-driven industries.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

Its role in strengthening the wider Cooper Street corridor through additional high-quality industrial capacity makes it an important future contributor to employment growth, industrial diversification and economic resilience.

Thomastown Industrial Precinct

Primary economic role

A long-established part of the Northern State Significant Industrial Precinct, Thomastown supports a wide range of industrial activity across IN1Z and C2Z zones, accommodating both traditional industrial uses including a significant manufacturing sector and commercial functions.

Scale and maturity

The precinct has evolved since the 1970s and continues to attract businesses seeking relocation and expansion opportunities. It features strong connectivity to regional and metropolitan transport networks.

Key constraints or enablers

Thomastown faces a key constraint in that it has virtually no vacant industrial land, with most of the precinct fully occupied across IN1Z and C2Z areas. However, significant opportunities exist through redevelopment and renewal of older industrial properties, consistent with its established pattern of revitalisation and transformation. Its location immediately adjoining the Metropolitan Ring Road provides a major competitive advantage, with demand expected to increase further once the North East Link is completed, reinforcing its role as a strategically accessible, high-value industrial hub.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

As a Tier 1 precinct, Thomastown is a priority for coordinated delivery, offering significant opportunities for industrial renewal, employment growth, skills alignment and leveraging its established economic base.

South Morang – Plenty Valley Town Centre

Primary economic role

Designated by the Victorian Government as a Major Activity Centre, the precinct functions as a civic, cultural, commercial and community hub anchored by the municipal Civic Precinct and Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre (PRACC).

Scale and maturity

It is well-established with substantial scope for additional community, civic and commercial development. Strong public transport access, including the South Morang train station, enhances its maturity and catchment.

Key constraints or enablers

Key enablers include strong public transport infrastructure and mixed-use development potential guided by the Plenty Valley Structure Plan. No major constraints are identified.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

The precinct will support service-sector employment, civic activation, mixed-use commercial growth and enhanced accessibility, forming a key part of the municipality's activity-centre network.

Bundoora

Primary economic role

Bundoora is a major northern regional centre hosting significant health, education and government institutions including RMIT University, Northpark Private Hospital and State Government departments.

Scale and maturity

The precinct is highly mature, with strong connectivity through Plenty Road, the M80 Ring Road and the under-construction North-East Link. The 86 tram provides direct access to the CBD, supporting high accessibility.

Key constraints or enablers

The precinct's key enablers include its close proximity to the La Trobe National Employment and Industry Cluster (NEIC), supported by major educational anchors such as RMIT University and La Trobe University and a skilled workforce that will underpin future employment growth. Strengthening this linkage will reinforce the precinct's long-term role within the region's knowledge, health and research economy, enhancing its strategic contribution to future economic development.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

Bundoora's role as a knowledge, health and education hub will support higher-skilled employment, research collaboration and the growth of knowledge-economy sectors across the municipality.

University Hill

Primary economic role

University Hill is a master-planned, award-winning mixed-use precinct integrating retail, office, commercial, residential, and light industrial activities with strong links to tertiary training, technology and R&D.

Scale and maturity

With 104 hectares and over \$1 billion invested, the precinct offers major commercial, retail and employment capacity, supported by flexible Special Use zoning enabling technology and education-related uses.

Key constraints or enablers

Key enablers include close proximity to the La Trobe NEIC and planning controls that encourage innovation-focused land uses. Constraints include a delay on the extension to the #86 Bundoora tram through to South Morang which would facilitate residents travelling to University Hill for employment.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

University Hill strengthens the municipality's capacity for high-value employment, diversified commercial space, and innovation-driven economic activity.

Mernda Town Centre

Primary economic role

Recognised as a Major Activity Centre, Mernda Town Centre serves the fast-growing Mernda and Doreen communities, providing retail, commercial, health, emergency services and employment functions.

Scale and maturity

The centre is expanding, with more than \$100 million in investment, 80,000 m² of commercial space, 30,000 m² of retail floor area and major assets such as the newly opened Mernda Community Hospital.

Key constraints or enablers

Key enablers include strong transport access via the Mernda Train Station and bus interchange, as well as recent arterial road upgrades improving connectivity.

Strategic relevance to the Economy Growth Strategy 2026–2036

The precinct is poised to generate up to 5,000 jobs across more than 100 businesses, supporting population-driven service sector growth, local employment creation and economic self-containment in the northern corridor.

Future employment precinct growth and development

Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and Northern Freight Employment Precinct

Economic role

The Beveridge Intermodal Precinct will become Australia's largest intermodal terminal, enabling double-stacked 1,800-metre freight trains and providing national connectivity to Perth and Sydney. It is designed to promote competition in rail freight through independent and open access and will anchor a major freight, logistics, warehousing and distribution hub across the wider northern region. The Northern Freight Employment Precinct will complement this by supporting higher-order industrial uses including data centres, warehousing, logistics and transport.

Timing

Stage 1 terminal operations are targeted to commence in mid-2028, with capacity expanding significantly through Stage 2. The adjoining Northern Freight precinct will build out over the long term as market demand, infrastructure delivery and state-led investment sequencing mature. Council will provide planning coordination and advocacy.

Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre

Economic role

The proposed Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre will serve as the primary employment and service hub for rapidly growing northern suburbs including Mickleham, Kalkallo, Donnybrook, Beveridge and Wallan. It will accommodate public and private schools, transport infrastructure, health services, community facilities and more than 80 hectares of open space, supporting a population of up to 380,000 and an estimated 50,000 jobs.

Timing

Development is tied to regional growth and state infrastructure sequencing, with the MAC expected to evolve over multiple decades as surrounding PSPs and transport corridors (rail, arterial upgrades) are progressively delivered.

Wollert

Economic role

Wollert is projected to accommodate 35,000–40,000 residents alongside approximately 8,000 jobs centred on a designated employment hub along Epping Road and the future Outer Metropolitan Ring (E6) corridor. The area supports an emerging circular-economy profile highlighted by the ReWaste food-to-energy facility, which diverts organic commercial waste from landfill and generates renewable energy.

Timing

Employment land delivery will progress in parallel with residential development and major state infrastructure investment, including the future OMR/E6 corridor and utility servicing. ReWaste's operations are ongoing and currently processing ~13,950 tonnes per year, scaling with future commercial demand.

Koukoura Business Park

Economic role

Koukoura Business Park (previously known as Aurora) is a planned future employment precinct spanning approximately 18 hectares, strategically located on O'Herns Road near the Hume Freeway interchange. Its role is to provide flexible industrial and commercial capacity that complements the broader Cooper Street corridor and supports logistics and light industrial activity.

Timing

The precinct is in early-stage planning, with development expected to occur in line with ongoing O'Herns Road upgrades and servicing availability. It forms part of the municipality's medium-term pipeline of emerging employment locations.

Shenstone Park

Economic role

Shenstone Park is a major mixed-use precinct on the Victorian Planning Authority's Fast Track Program. It will deliver a combination of residential neighbourhoods, employment areas, recreation and community facilities across 628 hectares, positioned between Donnybrook Road, Wollert, the Urban Growth Boundary and the Sydney/Melbourne rail corridor.

Timing

Implementation will occur across multiple stages under VPA direction, aligned with PSP approvals, developer investment and regional infrastructure sequencing. Proximity to Donnybrook Station enables earlier phases to leverage existing transport access.

Taken together, these precincts highlight a clear spatial logic for the Strategy: established employment capacity concentrated along the Cooper Street and Epping corridors, significant future growth tied to state-led freight and activity centre investment, and the need to sequence infrastructure, skills and land-use decisions to avoid dispersing effort.

Strategic prioritisation of employment precincts

The City of Whittlesea includes a large number of existing and planned employment precincts. While all are important to the municipality's long-term economic future, not all can be progressed with the same level of intensity over the Strategy period.

For the purposes of the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036, employment precincts are grouped according to their scale, maturity and the degree to which Council can materially influence outcomes over the next decade. This approach is intended to guide focus and sequencing, rather than exclude future opportunities.

Tier 1: Priority precincts for active Strategy focus (2026–2036)

These precincts represent the strongest near-to-medium term opportunity for job growth, investment attraction and economic recomposition. They already accommodate significant employment, have substantial private investment underway or imminent, and present clear levers for Council action.

Priority precincts include:

- Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre, including the health and knowledge precinct
- Cooper Street and O'Herns Road employment corridor
- Thomastown Industrial Precinct

For these precincts, the Strategy should adopt an active focus on coordinated delivery, including planning certainty, infrastructure alignment, investment facilitation, skills and workforce alignment, and targeted advocacy.

Tier 2: Strategic growth precincts requiring enabling action

These precincts have significant long-term employment potential but are highly dependent on the timing of State and/or Federal Government infrastructure investment, land servicing, market conditions and external delivery partners. Council's role is primarily enabling rather than directly delivering outcomes in the short term.

Strategic growth precincts include:

- Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and Northern Freight Employment Precinct
- Vearings Road Employment Precinct
- Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre

For these precincts, the Strategy should focus on land-use protection, early planning coordination, infrastructure and servicing advocacy, workforce planning, and positioning the precincts for future investment rather than short-term job delivery targets.

Tier 3: Local and supporting centres

These centres play an important role in supporting population growth, access to services and local employment opportunities, particularly in retail, health, education and professional services. While essential to liveability and workforce participation, they are not expected to drive large-scale net employment growth at a municipal level.

Supporting centres include:

- Mernda Town Centre
- Westfield Plenty Valley Shopping Centre
- University Hill Town Centre and DFO
- Pacific Epping Shopping Centre

The Strategy should support these centres through targeted place-based initiatives, improved access and amenity, and alignment with local workforce and business needs, while recognising their primary role in providing accessible local employment rather than major job concentration. This prioritisation will be reviewed over time as major infrastructure projects progress, market conditions change and new opportunities emerge.

Comparative council analysis

Comparative analysis

Purpose and approach

A jurisdictional analysis [19] compared the City of Whittlesea with growth area peers Wyndham (VIC), Melton (VIC), Casey (VIC), Moreton Bay (QLD) and Penrith (NSW). The purpose of this comparison is not to “rank” councils, but to build a clearer picture of how similar LGAs are responding to shared growth pressures, what conditions appear to make particular approaches effective, and what practical lessons can be adapted to the City of Whittlesea’s context.

By examining demographics, economic structure, spatial form, policy settings and strategies, the analysis identifies recurring patterns in what peers do, especially the balance between structural economic levers (that shift underlying conditions for jobs and investment) and enabling actions (that build capability and momentum).

Findings are then translated into this section in a way that supports decision-making: each peer approach is framed in terms of what problem it is trying to solve, the typical role Council plays, and how transferable it is to the City of Whittlesea’s high-growth, outer-metropolitan setting, recognising that some peers benefit from employment density or anchor institutions that the City of Whittlesea may not share.

How to read this section

- **Structural economic levers (LEVER):** actions that change underlying conditions for jobs and investment (e.g., land use, infrastructure sequencing, sector/precinct development, skills pipelines).
- **Enablers/supporting actions (ENABLER):** actions that facilitate delivery, capability or momentum (e.g., business support, collaboration, identity, programmatic pilots).
- **Transferability**
 - **T (Transferable now):** well-suited to the City of Whittlesea’s context and assets.
 - **TC (Transferable with conditions):** feasible where prerequisites (scale, anchors, partners) are in place.
 - **I (Illustrative):** useful exemplars but primarily context-specific to other LGAs.
- **Typical Council role** (not direct delivery unless stated):
 - **Planner:** sets strategic direction and land use/precinct frameworks to guide growth and investment outcomes.
 - **Regulator / Statutory authority / Monitor:** applies statutory responsibilities (approvals, compliance, enforcement) and monitors performance/progress against agreed measures.
 - **Facilitator:** convenes stakeholders, removes barriers, brokers partnerships and coordinates activity to enable outcomes.
 - **Deliverer / Provider / Partner:** delivers services/programs and/or co-delivers initiatives with partners (noting major infrastructure is typically delivered by other tiers unless specified).
 - **Funder / Enabler:** funds, co-funds or provides enabling resources (e.g., grants, incentives, pilots, capacity building) to unlock delivery.
 - **Advocate:** represents community and place priorities to influence decisions and investment by State/Federal Government, agencies and industry.

1) Place-based economic development: centres, precincts and employment lands

What peers do: strengthen priority centres/precincts, protect employment land, sequence enabling infrastructure, and improve competitiveness and identity.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Precinct planning and sequencing of enabling infrastructure	LEVER	T	Planner; Regulator/Statutory authority/Monitor; Advocate	Aligns with Cooper Street Employment Area, Epping MAC, Northern Hospital/health precinct, Wollert/Donnybrook growth areas
Employment land protection and renewal	LEVER	T	Planner; Regulator/Statutory authority/Monitor; Advocate	Supports long term industrial and logistics opportunities in the Northern SSIP context
Targeted centre activation to support local services and SMEs	ENABLER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Funder/Enabler (where applicable)	Useful where activation supports business conditions and amenity
Catalytic redevelopment around major infrastructure (e.g., airport precincts)	LEVER	I	Advocate	Illustrative only unless comparable catalysts emerge

2) Investment attraction, investment readiness and investor servicing

What peers do: couple attraction with “readiness” to reduce friction and clarify the value proposition.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Investment readiness (clear propositions, zoning certainty, guidance, pre-lodgement pathways)	LEVER	T	Planner; Regulator/Statutory authority/Monitor; Facilitator	Directly improves feasibility and time to investment
Targeted attraction for agreed priority sectors	LEVER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Advocate	Suits the City of Whittlesea’s advanced manufacturing/health/ agrifood strengths where evidence supports.
Concierge style investor servicing	ENABLER	TC	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner	Value rises with pipeline scale and cross council/ agency coordination

3) Workforce pathways, skills alignment and “jobs closer to home”

What peers do: align training to employer demand, lift participation, and target higher-value roles.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Industry aligned pathways with TAFE/universities/registrations	LEVER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Advocate	Supports local hiring in health, construction, manufacturing and logistics.
Targeted pathways for young people and priority cohorts	ENABLER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Funder/ Enabler (where applicable)	Complements employment services and provider networks.
Positioning skills as a core priority	LEVER	T	Facilitator; Advocate	Critical where population growth outpaces local job creation.

4) Business engagement, capability and resilience

What peers do: strengthen everyday conditions for doing business and maintain two-way engagement.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Targeted capability/resilience programs (digital, finance, tendering, export readiness)	ENABLER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Funder/Enabler (where applicable)	Good reach via chambers, networks and precinct associations
Business to business connection platforms	ENABLER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner	Works best when integrated with sector/precinct priorities and events
Continuous engagement beyond one off consultation	ENABLER	T	Facilitator	Improves responsiveness and reputation through supportive relationship management

5) Entrepreneurship, innovation and digital uplift

What peers do: incubators, hubs and ecosystem initiatives to support start-ups and SME innovation.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Digital uplift across SMEs (cyber, e commerce, AI adoption)	ENABLER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Funder/Enabler (where applicable)	Broadly transferable and high value for small businesses
Incubators/innovation hubs anchored by universities/major institutions	LEVER	TC	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Funder/Enabler (where applicable)	Transferable where anchor tenants and density exist or via regional partnerships. Opportunity to support or enhance industry clusters.
Start-up programs and networks	ENABLER	TC	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Funder/Enabler (where applicable)	Best when linked to priority sectors and real market problems

6) Strategic infrastructure as an economic catalyst

What peers do: leverage big transport/health/education/freight projects as anchors.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Align local economic initiatives to planned/funded infrastructure	LEVER	T	Planner; Regulator/Statutory authority/Monitor; Facilitator; Advocate	E.g., coordinating land use, skills and servicing to capture benefits
Structured advocacy for enabling infrastructure (transport, energy, digital)	LEVER	T	Advocate	Central to an outer metro context where delivery is State/Federal/utility led
Major infrastructure-led precincts (e.g., airport precincts)	LEVER	I	Advocate	Illustrative unless comparable state decisions affect the City of Whittlesea directly

7) Priority sectors and cluster focus

What peers do: select a small number of sectors to avoid dilution.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Focused sector agenda (e.g., advanced manufacturing, health, agribusiness; circular economy elements)	LEVER	T	Planner; Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Advocate	Best when tied to existing precincts and assets.
Visitor/nighttime economy intensification	ENABLER	TC	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Funder/ Enabler (where applicable)	Dependent on place attributes.

8) Leadership, identity and structured collaboration

What peers do: build the “soft infrastructure” (governance, partnerships and systems) that enables delivery.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Coordinated partnerships, taskforces and regional alliances	ENABLER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner; Advocate	Essential for cross jurisdictional issues (transport, skills, energy)
Economic identity and narrative	ENABLER	T	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner	Supports investment propositions when supported by evidence

9) Advocacy, role clarity, monitoring and reporting

What peers do: define roles, stage actions and report progress.

Initiative	Initiative	T/TC/I	Typical Council Role	Relevance to City of Whittlesea
Time bound advocacy linked to economic outcomes	ENABLER	T	Advocate	Advocacy priorities are reviewed and prioritised to ensure community needs are supported
Clear role definition (deliver/enable/partner vs plan/regulate/monitor vs facilitate vs advocate)	ENABLER	T	Planner; Regulator/Statutory authority/Monitor; Facilitator; Deliverer/ Provider/Partner; Funder/Enabler; Advocate	Councils role is clearly defined within parameters of responsibility.
Practical KPIs and public reporting	ENABLER	T	Regulator/Statutory authority/Monitor; Facilitator	Prioritise a small set of outcome measures (e.g., jobs to workers ratio, local job uplift, investment pipeline milestones)

What can the City of Whittlesea adopt from peers?

This section identifies the peer approaches most applicable to the City of Whittlesea and flags where additional scale, partners or anchor institutions would be needed before adoption

Strongly transferable now (T)

- Precinct led, place-based planning and infrastructure sequencing (LEVER)
- Investment readiness and targeted sector attraction tied to existing assets (LEVER)
- Workforce pathways aligned to local demand and priority cohorts (LEVER/ENABLER)
- Business capability and continuous engagement (ENABLER)
- Structured advocacy for transport/energy/digital enabling infrastructure (LEVER/ENABLER)
- Focused sector agenda (advanced manufacturing, health, agribusiness; circular elements) linked to Cooper Street, Epping MAC/Northern Hospital, and agricultural areas (LEVER)

Transferable with conditions (TC)

- Concierge investor servicing at scale (ENABLER)
- Incubators/innovation hubs requiring anchor institutions and density (LEVER/ENABLER)
- Visitor/night-time economy uplift where place attributes and demand support it (ENABLER)

Illustrative/context-specific (I)

- Mega-project precinct models (e.g., airport-led districts) unless a comparable state decision directly affects the City of Whittlesea (LEVER)

Implications for the Strategy (role and expectations)

- Council's primary role is planning, coordination and advocacy, not direct delivery of major infrastructure or institutional anchors.
- Structural levers for the City of Whittlesea sit in precinct/land-use settings, infrastructure sequencing, skills pathways and targeted sector focus – areas where Council can lead planning, coordinate partners and advocate effectively.
- Enablers (business capability, identity, partnerships, monitoring) should support those levers rather than expand the Strategy's scope.
- Selectivity is essential: a small number of place-based priorities with clear roles, partners, milestones and measures will deliver more impact than a broad list of initiatives.

Lessons for consideration

The analysis highlighted eleven key lessons to guide the development of the Council's Economic Growth Strategy. These lessons aim to provide practical guidance to shape the City of Whittlesea's priorities and initiatives, ensuring the Strategy is forward-looking, ambitious, and suited to the municipality's growth context.

Build a future focused and resilient economy. Embed entrepreneurship, innovation and skills development into the Strategy to prepare for emerging industries and a changing workforce. Foster partnerships with education providers and businesses to align local skills with future industry needs.

Leverage competitive strengths. Identify and promote the municipality's unique assets such as employment land, tourism, natural environment, or major infrastructure to attract investment and new industries.

Set ambitious, measurable targets and communicate progress. Establish bold but achievable goals (e.g. increasing job to resident ratio or jobs) and link every action to clear, specific KPIs where possible. Consider noneconomic success measures such as liveability and wellbeing alongside economic metrics. Track, report and publish progress updates in a timely and accessible way.

Distinguish core priorities from enabling actions. Define a small set of core strategic priorities to focus effort and advocacy, supported by a broader suite of enabling actions that create conditions for success. This clarity guides resourcing, sequencing and expectations.

Connect with Council's broader framework. Integrate broader council strategies and plans to ensure initiatives support each other. Clearly define Council's role as deliverer/provider/partner, funder/enabler, planner, regulator/statutory authority/monitor, facilitator and advocate to coordinate actions and responsibilities.

Prioritise sectors and initiatives. Focus resources on a small number of strategic and emerging sectors with the highest potential for growth. Avoid generic initiatives and focus on strategic initiatives. Group initiatives by type (e.g. events, programs, advocacy) and by priority to provide structure, flexibility and clarity for implementation.

Support and showcase local businesses. Support local businesses at all stages to grow, including expansion into international markets. Share local business success stories alongside Council's role in supporting them. This strengthens the municipality's economic identity and fosters community pride.

Strengthen advocacy and define stakeholder roles. Develop focused, time-bound advocacy strategies linked to economic outcomes and update them regularly to reflect changing political, market and infrastructure conditions. Clearly identify responsibilities for council, industry and partners to enable collaboration, avoid duplication and ensure accountability.

Stage initiatives over time. Sequence Strategy objectives and initiatives across short, medium and long term horizons to manage resources, deliver early wins and create a clear pathway for tackling larger or more complex projects. Regularly review and adapt to maintain relevance.

Plan for growth and infrastructure alignment. Align population growth with transport, housing and employment planning, and use placemaking principles to activate key precincts where conditions support extended trading and visitation.

Keep the Strategy concise, inclusive and adaptable. Limit the core document to around 15–20 pages with plain language and clear visuals to engage a wide audience. Consider including multilingual options. Use visual tools and concise messaging to make complex economic and demographic data easy to digest for residents, stakeholders and investors.

While the jurisdictions reviewed provide useful reference points, not all approaches are directly transferable to the City of Whittlesea. Several comparable councils benefit from higher employment density or established anchor institutions that the City of Whittlesea does not share. The Strategy should therefore focus on adapting underlying principles rather than replicating programs, with delivery models tailored to a high-growth, outer-metropolitan context.

Consultation – what we heard

To inform development of the draft Economic Growth Strategy, two stages of consultation were undertaken to test priorities, constraints and delivery implications, rather than to generate a long list of initiatives. The consultation identified issues, opportunities and areas of consensus, but it did not resolve trade-offs, establish sequencing or determine delivery responsibility. These decisions require strategic judgement in the strategy phase, balancing impact, feasibility and Council's role (lead, enable, advocate), to translate consultation insights into a focused set of priorities and staged actions.

Stage One – pre-consultation

Stage One involved a series of focus groups designed to capture stakeholders' perspectives on the City of Whittlesea's local economy, key issues, future trends and opportunities, and to seek feedback on potential strategies and initiatives to support local economic development outcomes. [20]

Focus groups included representatives from:

- Whittlesea Business Network
- Business Advisory Panel
- Whittlesea Reconciliation Group
- Federal, State and Local Governments
- Health and Community Services
- Education and Training
- Property and Real Estate, and
- Transport, Construction and Manufacturing

Urbis consulted with 67 stakeholders across 12 focus groups and four individual interviews, delivered virtually over a two-week period in September 2025. Consultation included a mix of virtual group interviews, short phone calls, and attendance at Council organised meetings.

What we heard - strengths

Stakeholders identified the following as key strengths of the City of Whittlesea's local economy, reflecting what is working well and why the municipality is an attractive destination for businesses and investment.:

- The City of Whittlesea is a diverse and rapidly growing municipality with a large and active small-business community.
- Council actively engages stakeholders to build strong business relationships and ensure initiatives reflect local needs.
- Ongoing capital investment across the municipality is stimulating development and future growth opportunities.
- A well-educated and skilled population provides businesses with access to a strong local labour pool.
- A multicultural community with a strong entrepreneurial spirit driving new business creation and innovation.
- The more established southern suburbs are key drivers of economic activity across the municipality.
- Circular economy principles are well established, supported by Council, property developers, and construction sectors.

- A young population and steady inflow of growing families drive ongoing demand for goods, services, and employment.
- A large number of small, home-based businesses add depth and diversity to the local economy.
- A well-established network of educational institutions provides education pathways and supports workforce development.

Many of the strengths identified reflect structural characteristics (population growth, diversity, location) rather than outcomes that are directly influenced by Council policy. This distinction is important for Strategy design.

What we heard - challenges

Stakeholders identified several factors that are limiting growth and investment in the municipality:

- Transport across the LGA remains largely car-dependent, with insufficient road and public transport infrastructure to support the growing population and economy
- High demand for more local job opportunities is strong but constrained by limited transport options, particularly in the north of the LGA
- Cost-of-living pressures are having a significant impact on local communities
- Rising business costs are affecting competitiveness and growth
- Limited access to childcare restricts workforce participation for young families and women
- Current and future jobs will require higher levels of skills and qualifications, with gaps in specialised manufacturing, soft skills, and digital capabilities
- Council procurement policies provide limited incentives to buy locally or engage social enterprises
- Industrial expansion is constrained by limited access to key utilities, including electricity
- Lengthy and administratively complex processes for planning and building permits can discourage investment in the LGA
- Residents in northern suburbs can experience high levels of social isolation
- Shifting consumer behaviours are requiring local businesses to invest more in promotion and marketing to compete with e-commerce and non-local providers
- Not enough collaboration with other northern LGAs to develop a shared identity and coordinated strategy for the region

Across consultation, three binding constraints were raised most consistently: transport connectivity (north-south and east-west access), access to skilled labour aligned to local industries, and enabling infrastructure constraints in employment areas (notably electricity capacity). Other issues, while important, were raised less consistently or sit outside Council's direct control.

City of Whittlesea's competitive strengths

Based on stakeholder consultation (and the jurisdictional analysis), several competitive strengths were identified, providing a clear advantage in attracting business, investment, and talent.

Competitive strengths were strongest where physical assets, institutions and investment pipelines align, rather than where advantages are purely demographic.

- Strong activity centres in Epping and University Hill
- Proximity to the Melbourne Airport and major transport links (Hume Highway, NorthEast Link)
- Catalytic infrastructure investment through the New Epping Health Hub and Beveridge Intermodal Precinct (BIP)
- Strong industrial sector, particularly in food and beverage manufacturing, logistics and advanced manufacturing

Future risks and trends

Stakeholders highlighted trends and risks that may shape the City of Whittlesea's economy over the next decade:

- Automation impacting jobs
- High population growth without sufficient local jobs
- Missed opportunities to harness infrastructure investment
- Increasing cost of living and cost of doing business
- Competition with other high-growth LGAs
- Limited readiness to adapt to and benefit from digital transformation and AI
- Insufficient skills and training to meet the needs of future industries
- Reduced social cohesion and community connection

These risks reinforce the need for the Strategy to focus on productivity, skills alignment and access to opportunity, rather than relying on population growth alone to drive economic outcomes.

Stage Two – discussion papers

Following the pre consultation activities, a series of themed discussion papers were developed. Each paper outlines key opportunities and challenges, includes examples from other regions, and presents “what if” scenarios to prompt community and stakeholder input:

- **Unlocking business growth and innovation:** Exploring bold ideas, emerging trends and transformative opportunities that will shape our economy over the next 10 years
- **Building jobs, skills and training:** Investigating how strategic partnerships, inclusive training models, and industry aligned pathways can unlock local talent
- **Driving investment, infrastructure and industry forward:** Delving into the strategic advantages of our location and the bold steps needed to unlock its full economic potential
- **Growing economies through culture and connection:** Exploring how public spaces, cultural infrastructure and creative activation can increase foot traffic and support local businesses.

For Stage Two, Urbis undertook targeted consultations with 47 stakeholders across four focus groups and five targeted interviews, delivered across November 2025. Consultation included a mix of virtual interviews and Council organised in session meetings. The discussion papers were also featured on the City of Whittlesea's Engage platform for three weeks, generating 21 survey responses, alongside one written response from the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and one written response from Council's Heritage team.

While the volume of public responses was modest, the feedback was consistent with stakeholder consultation and provides directional rather than statistically representative insight. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from the Engage platform and stakeholder consultations identified common themes and perspectives to inform the Strategy. [21]

What we heard – what the discussion papers got right

Stakeholders and internal groups broadly agreed that:

- The four priority areas in the discussion papers are the right focus for the City of Whittlesea over the next 10 years
- The papers correctly identified key issues limiting economic growth, including transport connectivity, local jobs and training, and the need for cultural and place activation
- Cultural diversity was consistently identified as a key strength, with potential to drive economic growth through inclusive employment and vibrant cultural offerings
- The BIP and future public transport connections to Wollert were highlighted as significant long-term infrastructure opportunities
- The inclusion of digital skills, AI literacy and automation as skills priorities was recognised as relevant to emerging industry needs and supporting future-proofing

Internal stakeholder discussions also highlighted:

- Strong support for connecting hospitals, schools and higher education providers through the Strategy, and maintaining a strong focus on skills and training (including AI and digital technology)
- Recognition of strengths in sport, food, music and cultural diversity, and support for including these assets in the Strategy narrative
- Mixed views from young people on entrepreneurship, alongside recognition that young people can be capable entrepreneurs if supported to turn hobbies and interests into businesses
- Support for healthcare as a priority sector, and for initiatives that strengthen inclusion and cultural safety, including specific recognition of First Peoples businesses and culturally safe workplaces

Prioritising the discussion paper themes

Feedback from the Engage survey ranked the discussion papers in the following order:

1. **Building jobs, skills and training for the future.** This paper received the greatest volume of feedback. Common themes included foundational education and skill development (including Learn Local opportunities) and pathways for young people, women with caring responsibilities and marginalised communities
2. **Driving investment, infrastructure and industry forward.** The importance of building the northern knowledge corridor and support for the manufacturing sector were considered the most important opportunities for consideration.
3. **Unlocking business growth and innovation.** Feedback emphasised connecting young people to employment, training and volunteering, and identified transport accessibility as a key enabler of retail spending and participation across the municipality
4. **Growing economies through culture and connection.** Feedback typically highlighted interest in more community and cultural events and the role these can play in increasing local and visitor spending.

The Stage 2 Stakeholder Consultation Summary notes that every discussion paper was ranked as “most important” by at least three respondents, indicating all four themes are important to the community and should be retained through Strategy development. However, while all themes were supported, feedback clearly prioritised jobs, skills and training, followed by investment readiness and infrastructure, culture and place activation were seen as important supporting enablers, rather than primary economic drivers. This hierarchy provides a useful guide for prioritising actions in the Strategy.

Opportunities for the Economic Growth Strategy 2026-2036

Consultation and analysis have identified a broad set of opportunities to strengthen the City of Whittlesea's economy through improved skills and workforce pathways, business growth, investment readiness, place-based delivery, and inclusive participation. These opportunities are summarised below (refer Appendix C for further detail).

Inclusion does not imply equal priority, feasibility, or deliverability within the Strategy period. The Strategy will need to be selective, focusing on opportunities that are structurally important, evidence-led, aligned with Council's role and levers, and capable of being progressed over the next 10 years within realistic funding, governance and delivery constraints.

Strong, structurally important opportunities

Opportunities in this category influence long term economic outcomes such as job creation, productivity, investment attraction and workforce participation, and are expected to form the core focus of the Strategy.

Opportunity	Council Role
Set a delivery roadmap that defines priorities, sequencing, responsibilities, timeframes and KPIs	Planner; Facilitator
Adopt a place-based approach in priority hotspots (e.g., Epping, Mernda, Beveridge), aligning land use, infrastructure, employment, training and transport	Deliver/Partner; Planner; Facilitator; Advocate
Streamline planning and approvals for priority and large-scale investment, and advocate for complementary State led approvals and infrastructure	Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor; Planner; Advocate
Convene cross sector skills partnerships to align pipelines and lift digital/AI capability	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/Partner (agreements/contracts); Advocate
Target health sector growth by leveraging precinct planning and partnerships around anchors such as the New Epping Health Hub	Planner; Facilitator; Advocate; Partner (local initiatives where appropriate)

Secondary or enabling opportunities

These opportunities support and amplify the impact of structural priorities by strengthening participation, capability and delivery conditions.

Opportunity	Council Role
Align social procurement and partnerships to expand inclusive employment pathways for First Peoples, people with disability and other priority groups	Funder/Enabler; Facilitator; Advocate; Regulator (policy settings)
Define and communicate a clear economic narrative (priority sectors, distinctive strengths) coordinated with industry and stakeholders	Facilitator; Partner; Deliverer (for promotional collateral)

Tactical or optional initiatives

Initiatives in this tier may deliver localised benefits but are less likely to drive structural change on their own and should be pursued selectively or on a trial basis.

Opportunity	Council Role
Trial night-time economy activations in one or two suitable, well-connected locations with streamlined local settings and evaluation before scale	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/Partner (pilots)

Key directions

Key directions translate Council's long-term vision into clear, measurable areas of focus for the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036. These key directions have been developed following the review of previous Key Directions, using the evidence base brought together through the Strategy process, drawing on consultation and accompanying analysis. This ensures priorities are informed by what we heard, as well as economic data, market trends and feasibility considerations.

These set out the community outcomes Council are working toward, the roles Council will play to influence change, and the indicators used to monitor progress over time. Together, they provide a practical line of sight from aspiration to delivery, supporting a strong local economy through a vibrant and inclusive economy, future-focused skills and training pathways, and stronger innovation, investment and business growth across the municipality.

Key Direction	Community Outcome
<i>Skills and knowledge for the future</i>	Our residents have a variety of career and learning pathways
	Our businesses have the skills and knowledge to remain competitive
<i>Investment and infrastructure for industry growth</i>	City of Whittlesea is recognised as a strategic destination for investment
	City of Whittlesea is a productive contributor to the Victorian economy
<i>Business growth and innovation</i>	Our businesses are positioned to adapt to changing environments
	Our businesses are supported and connected to thrive
<i>Vibrant and inclusive economy</i>	Our businesses meet the needs of our local community and visitors, strengthening our City as a destination
	Our residents actively participate in our economy

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Appendix A: Level 3 action plans

This appendix provides the detailed actions and outcomes for the five Level 3 plans developed under the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022–2026, to support transparency and inform drafting of the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036.

It is important to mention that the outcome comments have been made at a point in time, with some actions still in progress at the time of developing this paper.

Agri-Food Plan

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
2, 3	Continue to support and collaborate with Melbourne's North Food Group and key stakeholders through networking and development opportunities	Delivered multiple networking events in collaboration with MNFG and DJSIR to support the food and beverage sector
		Developed Local Food Discovery Zone at the 2024 and 2025 City of Whittlesea Community Festival to support the food and beverage sector
1, 2, 3	Identify and scope opportunities for supporting start up manufacturers such as a food incubator program	Developed and delivered learning workshops relevant to new/small food businesses in social media and content marketing, cashflow and budgeting for growth, Artificial Intelligence for small business, next level growth and circular business
3	Deliver mapping of agri-food supply chain businesses to encourage businesses to business interactions and promote the agri-food sector	Identified agri-food businesses for mapping and encouraged business to business interactions to promote and showcase the food and beverage clusters in the City of Whittlesea
1, 3	Support the development of the Australian Food Innovation Centre (AFIC)	La Trobe University have confirmed that the project known as AFIC is no longer proceeding in its current format and will be repositioned in due course. Council will work with stakeholders by continuing to provide support to businesses in the Food and Beverage sector through existing programs and initiatives
3	Review and explore options that encourage greater use of the green wedge land asset for agriculture	This project is currently on hold and will be addressed as through the development of the Economic Growth Strategy to promote and encourage sustainable agricultural production in the green wedge
3	Support new and existing agriculture businesses through farm rate process streamlining and assessment of properties	Reviewed the farm rate application form to support existing producers and encourage further productive activities.
2, 3	Identify and promote agricultural opportunities for	Investigated potential future agricultural opportunities for small-scale properties

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
	small-scale properties to encourage growth of sustainable agriculture	Developed a small-scale commercial agriculture brochure and supporting considerations for small-scale commercial agriculture businesses document to encourage growth of sustainable agriculture Supported Melbourne Polytechnic's pilot farm management plan short course to support existing and new agricultural businesses
2, 3	Support the agri-food sector to be future ready through improved connectivity between industry, local education, and research and development	Supported export program in collaboration with Melbourne's North Food Group and Export Connection to support the agri-food sector to be future ready Supported initiatives led by educational institutions relating to food innovation to support the food and beverage sector Partnered/collaborated with educational institutions to provide free food and beverage focused online training
1, 2	Encourage collaboration between educational institutions, local business, external stakeholders and industry to understand the training needs of the future workforce	Partnered with the Victorian Skills Authority to host a roundtable to improve awareness of the education and training needs/gaps in the food and beverage sector Supported Melbourne Polytechnic in the development of a short course to build skills for entry level and supervisory roles across the food and beverage sector

Circular Economy Plan

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
2	Develop and implement a behaviour change campaign for businesses to learn how to transition to circular principles, with the help of external stakeholders such as education providers	Partnered with Sustainability Victoria and Hume City Council to deliver the Sustainability Victoria's Buy Recycled Service – Showcase 13 June 2024 Sponsorship of Melbourne's North Circular Economy Summit hosted by NorthLink - a practical, action-focused event connecting Melbourne's North businesses with circular economy experts, innovative exhibitors and industry leaders to share solutions, build networks and drive sustainable business growth We hosted a Retail and Hospitality event where we featured a key-note speaker from Reground who addressed ways in which small businesses can minimise waste and save costs Delivered an information session to retail businesses in Lalor on practical waste-management tips relating to

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
		recycling, safe bin use and how to avoid fines through improved waste management practices
3	Connect and support local businesses and entrepreneurs to showcase their circular economy products and services	Featuring one 'Circular/Sustainable Business' in each edition of the City of Whittlesea's business monthly eNews
		There is a Sustainability and Environment award category in the annual City of Whittlesea business awards
		A 'Speed date a sustainability expert' is an event designed for residents of the CoW where sustainability experts across a range of industries and businesses provide help and advice relating to their area of expertise
2	Deliver materials to increase awareness of the circular economy to businesses	The Circular Economy information brochure published and subsequently updated in 2025
		Councils' Sustainable Business web pages have been refreshed and continue to be updated as new information and resources become available
3	Advocate for better product labelling of recycled content – to indicate how much of the packaging materials are made from recycled components	Information and resources have been made available on Councils' Sustainable Business web pages as well as promoted through our monthly business eNews
3	Identify and build relationships with businesses in key industries to transition to circular operations	40 local businesses identified within the Municipality who are applying circular economy practices within their business model, or their businesses products or services are delivered through sustainable practices with the emphasis on circularity. Such as Epping based Eriez who delivers stainable separation technologies, enabling material recovery, reducing waste, supporting circular economy, and advancing manufacturing across industries
3	Explore opportunities for a soft plastics collection point for businesses	A 'soft plastics' collection point was made available at the 2025 City of Whittlesea Community Festival where stall holders (businesses) could dispose of their waste avoiding landfill
2	Connect businesses with opportunities to develop and transform food waste into valuable resources	A Food Organics pilot program for businesses launched with 12 businesses onboard for the 6-month trial
2	Inform businesses about grants and funding opportunities that	The Business-to-Business Grants Program supports sustainable initiatives including energy efficiency improvements, waste audits and action plans, and

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
	will help them shift their business models to circularity	recycling initiatives such as food waste diversion and zero-waste packaging
3	Promote circular businesses by linking with the Buy Recycled or other online platforms	Council has been spotlighting a variety of businesses incorporating circular and sustainable practices in the monthly business eNews, then further promoted and shared within Councils business directory Platforms
		Platforms such as Buy Recycled are promoted on Councils website to support the recycling and reuse of business waste streams.

Destination Plan

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
1	Identify opportunities for Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre (PRACC) to curate and present a variety of performing arts programming, such as theatre, music, dance, and comedy.	PRACC is featured as a key venue in the MICE Prospectus, reinforcing its role in supporting the municipality's arts, culture and creative industries.
		In the Autumn 2026 edition of the Official Visitors Guide, PRACC is positioned as the City of Whittlesea's flagship cultural hub, recognised as a leading destination for theatre, music, dance, comedy and broader cultural experiences.
3	Promote Ziebell's Farmhouse as place for storytelling the history and heritage of the area and support the development of expanded content	Enhanced promotion of Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum on Explore Whittlesea including featured article marking settlers' anniversary.
		Promotion advertising in <i>Let's Go Kids</i> 2024–25 and feature in the 25/26 <i>Official Visitors Guide</i> and feature in tourism videos.
1	Support and encourage the establishment of activities and events at the Aboriginal Gathering Place	Trail maps updated to showcase Quarry Hills (Bunjil Nganga Parklands)
3	Develop promotional videos that highlights things to see and do including sites of significance, festivals and events	Produced a suite of three 60-second videos and a longer set for large screens that were filmed across key sites and events showcasing (nature; food & drink; arts/culture/heritage/events)
1	Explore opportunities to attract large festivals and events to the area	Stakeholder engagement with all major venues in the municipality to determine capacity and suitability for large events, and the City of Whittlesea has increased its visibility as an event-ready destination through

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
		sponsorship and presence at key events, including the That's Amore Ricotta Festival, Whittlesea Agricultural Show, Whittlesea Country Music Festival, and the City of Whittlesea Community Festival via the Discovery Zone.
1	Identify opportunities for trail networks, picnic areas and cultural activities in Quarry Hills Regional Parkland	Promoted the newly developed trails to further enhance community and visitor access and enjoyment of the Quarry Hills Regional Parkland.
1	Develop print and digital itineraries for walking and cycling, linking with public transport and popular sites	New walking and cycling itineraries were developed in partnership, and a four-section Darebin Creek Trail storymap with descriptions, images and videos has been produced, supported by a companion promotional video. These resources help residents and visitors explore the area sustainably while connecting public transport and popular destinations.
1	Identify opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring municipalities to encourage tourism visitation to places of interest	Initiated a joint promotion with Hume City Council in the Official Visitor Guide to promote key iconic experiences and nature based assets.
1	Develop food trails and itineraries to highlight places of interest	Food trails and itineraries designed in collaboration with local producers and makers and distributed at the City of Whittlesea Community Festival. A series of food trail itineraries loaded to the Explore Whittlesea website.
2	Support the hospitality sector to utilise locally made produce on their menus, digital media under the It's all Here banner and promote outdoor dining area's	Strengthened support for the hospitality sector by developing new promotional materials under the It's All Here banner and showcasing venues that feature locally made produce. Outdoor dining was further promoted through Local Scoop with QR links to Explore Whittlesea, alongside ongoing e-news features.
3	Support the retailers to promote and sell locally made produce	Enhanced retailer support by deepening engagement and providing tailored promotional resources, boosting their ability to showcase and sell locally made produce. Increased visibility of participating retailers and makers through videos, Explore Whittlesea features, and Economic Development eNews.
2	Support accommodation providers to create packages that link accommodation with local food and other interests	Implemented a comprehensive package document showcasing nine accommodation operators and created six package concepts with a one-page guide.
3	Be involved in developing wayfinding signage for	Commenced the development of wayfinding signage for key tourism sites, by establishing baseline knowledge of

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
	significant tourism sites, roads, trails and paths.	signage policies and gaps, gathering business feedback, and creating educational resources to support compliance and engagement.
1	Develop an industry prospectus to promote local function and events spaces through tourism networks and support Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention centre (PRACC) to position itself as a venue of choice for performing arts and creative industries.	Implemented a Meeting, Incentives, Conventions and Events (MICE) Prospectus which is published on Explore Whittlesea website.
3	Promote the area as a destination of choice for investment in accommodation services, more trails, parks and infrastructure	Promoted new Quarry Hills Regional Parkland trails and delivered updated walking and cycling itineraries, including the Darebin Creek Trail StoryMap and video Launched an enhanced Explore Whittlesea platform with new cultural, heritage and interactive mapping features Strengthened destination promotion through maintained listings, media exposure and commencement of the 2026 Festival Visitor Discovery Zone planning. Website engagement surged over 90 days, with views up 3,088%, active users up 8,093% and new users up 9,437%
3	Explore possible locations for RV's, caravan storage and a caravan park.	After meeting with stakeholders from the Showground and Recreation Reserve Committee of Management, regarding the RV Friendly Town project, no suitable locations were identified. As a result, the project will not progress.

Economic Participation Plan

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
1 & 2	Deliver a jobs event to support women into work	Over 60 residents attended the Epping Galada Women's Job and Training Event with Lend Lease. The event featured 30 job opportunities on the day and 19 exhibitors, including builders, social enterprises, aged care employers, and Kinetic bus service promoting driver roles for women, along with training and career providers.
1	Continue partnership with Hume Whittlesea Local	Supported and promoted the HWLLEN to deliver the Real Industry Jobs Interviews in 2023, 2024 and 2025 with

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
	Learning Employment Network in the delivery of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment employment initiatives	over 1000 students gaining a 'real' job interview situation preparing them for future career pathways each year. In March 2025, Council co-hosted the Career Networking Expo at PRACC, to promote local jobs and careers, with over 950 students in attendance.
1 & 2	Support the delivery of a local Job Advocate Service	The service provided more than 8,000 individuals across Whittlesea with information, advice and referrals to skills, training apprenticeships, support with CV and interview skills and wraparound services such as food and financial assistance, NDIS, migration advice, housing and homelessness.
1	Promote small business mentoring and other related services to priority group cohorts.	Mentoring service offered through a range of various workshops including the Women's Arabic group and Women's Lunch Series in collaboration with Whittlesea Community Connections.
1, 2	Identify and scope social enterprise opportunities	Councils promote Social Enterprise businesses through the City of Whittlesea website and through opportunities to promote and collaborate through the City of Whittlesea Business Network. Delivered a 2-day bespoke masterclass run with Swinburne Centre for Social Impact designed to help build capacity, including a shared understanding of being a social enterprise, develop strategies to be more impactful and sustainable, as well as measure and communicate social and environmental impacts
1	Deliver an Inclusive Employment program	The Inclusive Employment Program continues to provide valuable employment opportunities for local residents facing barriers to finding suitable and meaningful work with 10 participants successfully completed the Program. In 2025/2026 FY it will see two participants completing the Program for a duration of 12 months.
1	Explore opportunities for university and work experience placements	Partnered with La Trobe University Northern Study Hub connecting support services, businesses and programs with students. Partnering with RMIT University and Whittlesea Tech School to connect industry. Partnered with the HWLLEN to deliver the Careers on Wheels event supporting students to access work placements.
1, 2	Targeted place-based employment initiatives in identified precincts	Partnered with PRACE to deliver targeted training in construction, hospitality and education resulting in 71 co designed introductory courses and 40 employment

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
		outcomes with 90% of participants City of Whittlesea residents.
		Collaborated with Social Outcome Solutions to host a social procurement and inclusive jobs event across multiple industry sectors, achieving 45 job placements for residents in Melbourne's North
		Delivered a Youth Jobs Event in partnership with Belgravia and Mill Park Leisure Centre, attracting 47 young people to explore opportunities in leisure, hospitality, and aquatic services.
		Partnered with Melbourne Polytechnic to run an accredited food preparation training course, successfully completed by 13 City of Whittlesea residents.

Investment Attraction Plan

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
1	Implement the Investment Attraction Communications Framework and actively promote opportunities through marketing and communications	Annual plan of promotional and marketing activities developed and implemented including promotional materials, paid advertising, direct marketing and promotional tactics, to support increased engagement and awareness of the City of Whittlesea as a strategic location for business.
	Actively promote the opportunities of the municipality through Investment Attraction marketing and communications	An integrated promotional and marketing plan targeting key decision makers within priority industries, as well as internal and external partners. The mix includes digital, print, social media and direct to market channels to increase engagement and awareness of business opportunities within the municipality.
		The City of Whittlesea Business Opportunities explorer online interactive map provides business decision makers and potential investors capacity to easily view planning zones, business parks, transport routes and future opportunities.
1	Develop and implement the business grants and incentives program for business attraction and support	Delivered two grant programs that supported business expansion, innovation and local job creation. The Business Relocation and Growth Program assisted eligible businesses to invest locally and increase employment opportunities for the City of Whittlesea residents. The Business-to-Business Grant Program supported local

Key Direction	Action	Outcome
		business improvement initiatives, innovation projects and capability development. Both programs aimed to strengthen economic resilience, encourage business attraction and retention and support sustainable growth across the municipality. This is supported by a promotional campaign across social media, the City of Whittlesea website and via the monthly Business e-news.
1	Review and implement an updated Priority Development Assessment Process (PDAP)	Reviewed and updated the Priority Development Assessment Process to improve clarity, accessibility and alignment with economic development priorities. The refined process was promoted through updated collateral and engagement with the development and business community. These improvements supported a more consistent pathway for significant projects that demonstrate strong community benefit, local employment outcomes, sustainable design or strategic alignment with Council priorities. This is supported by a promotional campaign across social media, the City of Whittlesea website and via the monthly Business e-news.
2	Deliver industry development programs for priority sectors and facilitate and advocate for key activity centres and employment precincts	Delivered a program of industry focused events, workshops and engagement activities designed to strengthen priority sectors and support local business capability. This included sector relevant networking, skills development, and partnership initiatives with peak bodies, education providers and industry groups. The program aimed to foster innovation, encourage business retention, and enable stronger connections between local businesses, stakeholders and emerging opportunities within key sectors.
3	Continue to actively facilitate and advocate for the development and implementation of key activity centres and employment precincts	Maintained strong collaboration with developers, industry representatives, real estate agents, and government partners to advance the development of key activity centres and employment precincts. Work centred on promoting investment readiness, supporting timely land development, sharing up-to-date market information, and highlighting opportunities across precincts such as Epping, Thomastown, South Morang, Bundoora, Mernda, Wollert and the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct. Engagement activities and promotional materials helped increase the profile of these precincts as strategic locations for commercial and industrial investment.

Appendix B: Municipal profile (detailed table)

This appendix provides a detailed profile of the City of Whittlesea to support the Strategy's evidence base and place-based priorities.

Category	Indicator	City of Whittlesea
Location and Scale	Distance from Melbourne CBD	~20 km north [8]
	Land area	~490 km ² [6]
	Proportion of rural land	~60% [6]
Population	Estimated resident population (2026)	~268,944 [7]
	Average annual population growth (2026-2036)	~3% [7]
	Forecast population (2036)	~358,976 [7]
	Median age	~34 years [6]
Diversity	Residents born overseas	~44% [6]
	Speak language other than English at home	~49% [6]
	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander population	One of highest in metropolitan Melbourne (1% of City of Whittlesea's total population [6])
Economy	Gross Regional Product (GRP)	~\$12.2 billion [2]
	Local jobs	~85,000 [2]
	Number of businesses	~22,000 [2]
	Jobs–resident worker ratio	<1 (net workforce exporter) [2]
Key Industries	Largest employing sectors	Health Care & Social Assistance; Retail; Manufacturing; Construction; Education and Training [2]
Education and Skills	Bachelor degree or higher	~27–30% [6]
	No post-school qualification	Above metro average [6]
Employment Patterns	Residents commuting outside LGA	~55–60% [6]
Employment Precincts	Major job locations	Epping, Thomastown, Lalor, Hume corridor [2]
Growth Areas	High-growth suburbs	South Morang, Mernda, Doreen [6]
Transport and Access	Key infrastructure	Hume Freeway; Metropolitan Ring Road [8]

Appendix C: Opportunities for the Economic Growth Strategy (comprehensive list)

This appendix documents the full range of opportunities identified through Stage One and Stage Two consultation and the jurisdictional analysis. It complements the summary of priority opportunities in the main body of the Strategy by recording additional opportunities and supporting actions raised during engagement.

The opportunities below represent a comprehensive long list. They are grouped to distinguish between structurally important opportunities, supporting or enabling actions, and tactical or optional initiatives. Inclusion in this appendix does not imply equal priority, feasibility or deliverability within the Strategy period. The Economic Growth Strategy will be selective, focusing on opportunities aligned with Council's role, evidence base and realistic delivery capacity.

The opportunities below are grouped to distinguish between:

- Strong, structurally important opportunities: levers that shift underlying economic conditions (e.g., precinct development, investment readiness, workforce pipelines, infrastructure alignment, major project leverage).
- Secondary or enabling opportunities: actions that strengthen delivery conditions, capability, inclusion and investor confidence, but typically rely on the structural levers to deliver large-scale outcomes.
- Tactical or optional initiatives: trials or place-specific initiatives that may deliver localised benefits and can be scaled if evidence supports.

Strong, structurally important opportunities

Opportunities in this category influence long-term economic outcomes and represent primary levers available to Council through planning, coordination and advocacy.

Primary Council roles: Planner; Regulator / Statutory Authority / Monitor; Facilitator; Advocate; Deliverer / Provider / Partner (where appropriate).

Focus Area	Opportunity	Council Role
Strategy design and accountability	Develop a clear delivery roadmap with priorities, sequencing, responsibilities, timeframes and measurable outcomes/KPIs, including early wins	Planner; Facilitator; Regulator/ Statutory Authority/ Monitor; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner (program coordination)
	Stage initiatives over time (short/medium/long) and maintain a regular review cycle	Planner; Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor; Facilitator
	Strengthen monitoring and public reporting in a practical, sustainable way (clear KPIs; accessible updates)	Regulator/Statutory Authority/ Monitor; Deliverer/Provider/ Partner (reporting systems)
Place-based delivery and	Adopt a place-based approach in priority hotspots (e.g. Epping, Mernda, Beveridge) targeting infrastructure upgrades, job creation,	Planner; Facilitator; Advocate; Regulator/Statutory Authority/ Monitor (where relevant)

Focus Area	Opportunity	Council Role
infrastructure alignment	training, cultural events and transport connectivity	
	Align growth with transport, housing and employment planning , including advocacy for improved internal connectivity and access to employment hubs and industrial lands	Planner; Advocate; Facilitator; Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor
	Leverage major projects as catalysts , including the New Epping Health Hub and Beveridge Intermodal Precinct, to maximise jobs, investment and training outcomes	Facilitator; Advocate; Planner; Deliverer/Provider/Partner (local enabling actions where appropriate)
Investment readiness, planning reform and enabling conditions	Streamline planning and approvals for priority and large-scale investment projects, including transparent/competitive timeframes	Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor; Planner; Facilitator
	Establish regular engagement between priority developers and senior Council leadership to strengthen relationships, improve communication and align major developments with Council priorities	Facilitator; Planner; Advocate
	Engage with energy providers to understand reliable power availability and constraints across employment areas (including emerging uses like data centres) and communicate site readiness where appropriate	Facilitator; Advocate; Planner
Skills, workforce pathways and business–education connections	Connect businesses, industry, government and training providers to address skills gaps, align pipelines and lift digital literacy and AI readiness	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/Partner (MOUs etc.); Advocate
Sector and precinct growth opportunities	Target growth in the health sector , including additional community health hubs in growth areas and leveraging established health assets as anchors	Planner; Facilitator; Advocate; Deliverer/Provider/Partner (local initiatives as appropriate)
Sector and precinct growth opportunities	Continue to strengthen manufacturing and industrial advantage , including sustainability and circular economy opportunities, to support investment attraction and workforce development	Planner; Advocate; Facilitator; Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor

Secondary or enabling opportunities

These opportunities support and amplify the impact of structural priorities by strengthening participation, capability and delivery conditions.

Primary Council roles: Facilitator; Deliverer / Provider / Partner; Funder / Enabler; Advocate

Focus Area	Opportunity	Council Role
Economic identity, narrative, profile and tools	Define and communicate a clear economic narrative by articulating distinctive strengths and priority sectors; elevate the City of Whittlesea's profile as an economic destination (business base, assets, opportunities, investor pathways); prepare a clear municipal profile (growth context, diversity, key precincts, infrastructure advantages, sector strengths); and translate the profile into practical tools (hotspot/precinct map, "why invest here" narrative, sector snapshots, baseline metrics) for consistent use across Strategy priorities, investor messaging, advocacy and monitoring	Facilitator; Planner; Advocate; Deliverer/Provider/Partner (content, collateral and platforms)
Business support and engagement	Improve business support visibility and accessibility on Council platforms (website/communications) so grants, advisory, permits guidance and networking are easier to find	Deliverer/Provider/Partner; Facilitator; Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor (process clarity)
	Support and strengthen local business growth , including tailored, practical assistance for small businesses to scale and better promotion of existing supports	Deliverer/Provider/Partner; Facilitator; Funder/Enabler (targeted programs).
Workforce participation and inclusion	Support young people into skills and local employment via targeted programs and partnerships with schools, business and education providers (e.g., pathways, internships, job fairs).	Facilitator; Deliverer/Provider/Partner; Funder/Enabler
	Strengthen employment pathways for priority cohorts , including women with caring responsibilities and marginalised communities, reflecting consultation feedback	Facilitator; Partner (Deliverer/Provider/Partner); Advocate
Inclusive growth, social procurement and cultural safety	Strengthen inclusive employment by aligning Council's social procurement and partnerships to create pathways and jobs for First Peoples, people with disability and other marginalised groups	Funder/Enabler; Facilitator; Advocate; Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor (policy settings)
	Prioritise local procurement , including increased engagement of local and Wurundjeri businesses where appropriate, to retain economic benefit within the municipality	Funder/Enabler; Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor
	Support First Peoples owned businesses through promotion, learning and networking, culturally safe engagement and practical procurement pathways	Facilitator; Funder/Enabler; Deliverer/Provider/Partner

Focus Area	Opportunity	Council Role
	Advance cultural safety in workplaces through Council-led training and practical initiatives (e.g., culturally safe practices and yarning circles) to support participation and retention	Deliverer/Provider/Partner; Facilitator

Tactical or optional initiatives

Initiatives in this tier may deliver localised benefits but are less likely to drive structural change on their own and should be pursued selectively or on a trial basis.

Primary Council roles: Facilitator; Regulator / Statutory Authority / Monitor; Deliverer / Provider / Partner (pilot delivery)

Focus Area	Opportunity	Council Role
Activation, culture and visitor economy	Trial nighttime economy activations in one or two safe, well-connected locations, reducing unnecessary regulatory barriers and amplifying existing cultural offerings; evaluate before any broader rollout	Facilitator; Regulator/Statutory Authority/Monitor; Deliverer/Provider/Partner (pilots)
	Leverage cultural and community events and placemaking to strengthen social cohesion, support local spend and visitation, and build a stronger sense of identity and connection	Deliverer/Provider/Partner; Facilitator; Funder/Enabler (targeted support)



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