



**Proposed Budget 2026-27 and
Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27**

***Phase 4 Community Engagement Summary
22 April – 6 May 2026***

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea's *Community Plan 2025-2029* is Council's main strategic planning document. It expands on the long-term community vision, *Whittlesea 2040: A place for all*, to include key outcome priorities, services, and initiatives over the next four years. It plays a central role in Council's overall strategic planning and reporting framework.

Each year Council develops a Community Action Plan (CAP), which is an annual supplement to the *Community Plan 2025-29*. This action plan outlines the key actions to be completed over the next financial year to build towards achieving the Community Plan and ultimately our Whittlesea 2040 goals. These goals are for a Connected Community, Liveable Neighbourhoods, a Strong Local Economy, a Sustainable Environment, and a High-Performing Organisation.

Similarly, each year the City of Whittlesea releases an annual budget that sets a financially responsible path forward for the organisation to continue to deliver critical investment in services and key infrastructure to support our rapidly growing community. The budget is formed to align to our long-term financial plan which balances our current spending on projects and services for the community and strengthens our long-term financial sustainability.

Council consulted with people who live, work, study or visit the municipality to understand what was important to them and the areas they thought funding should be allocated to. The multi-phased engagement approach was designed to ensure feedback was captured from a diverse range of community members. The feedback gathered through the community engagement was used to inform the development of the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* and the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27*.

The community engagement to inform these key documents consists of four phases.



This report provides a brief overview of the first three phases and focuses on the fourth phase of community engagement undertaken from **22 April to 6 May 2026**. Phase four involved sharing the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* (22 April – 28 April 2026) and *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* (22 April – 6 May 2026) for community feedback.

Community feedback on both the *Proposed Budget 2026–27* and the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* showed strong engagement and a generally constructive tone, with many residents recognising Council's efforts to listen and plan for a growing community.

While views on the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* were mixed, the most significant concern was the absence of funding for the aquatic component of the regional sports precinct in Mernda. This issue dominated feedback, with 53 comments. Those who wanted funding for aquatics felt they were unable to support the budget as a result. Other concerns were more isolated but included dissatisfaction with funding allocations for specific clubs and suburbs, rate rises, and a desire for greater investment in core services like roads and waste.

The *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* received majority support, with participants appreciating its focus on social inclusion, arts and culture, sustainability, and improved services. Even among those who raised concerns, feedback was largely solution-focused and aimed at strengthening the plan. Supportive participants highlighted the plan's alignment with community needs, praised Council's engagement approach, and endorsed the advocacy areas identified. The City of Whittlesea Youth Council also offered positive endorsement, noting the plan's accessibility and strong alignment with their priorities.

Overall, the community's input reflects a desire for equitable investment, continued transparency, and steady progress on long-standing projects.

How we engaged you

Overview of phase one, phase two and phase three community engagement

This first phase of community engagement included online digital engagement via the *Engage Whittlesea* platform and 15 community-based pop-up stalls held in different locations across the municipality. During phase **one** there was a total of 1,052 contributions, 870 of these were from in-person activities and 182 were made via the *Engage Whittlesea* platform. They told us that their top five priorities (out of thirteen) for our community are:

1. **roads, public transport and footpaths (362 responses)** including road safety, local roads, parking, shared user paths, cycling infrastructure and public transport advocacy
2. **community safety (356 responses)** including school crossings, Immunisation services, lighting in public spaces, prevention of violence against women and community local law.
3. **ageing well services (350 responses)** including aged care at home services, positive ageing and social connection.
4. **community facilities (332 responses)** including aquatic facilities, community activity centres, libraries and sporting facilities
5. **community wellbeing (282 responses)** including mental health support, inclusion, connection, and cost-of-living support.

Phase **two** was designed as a check-in and enabled Council to share what we heard phase one and check that it was still reflective of current community sentiment. The *Engage Whittlesea* project page was updated with the top five priorities for community. Participants were asked if they agreed with what had been captured in phase one and had the opportunity to add additional comments and suggestions. A total of 61% agreed with the top priorities, while 39% disagreed. See results [here](#).

In phase **three** we held three community focus groups as part of the deliberative engagement process. A total of 46 community members participated in one of three focus groups in different

locations across the municipality. Recruitment for the focus groups took place via an Expression of Interest (EOI) from 1 September 2025 - 31 December 2025. The focus groups were held during February 2026 in Whittlesea, South Morang and Lalor.

Participants worked in small table groups and generated 207 ideas in response to the three questions posed in the session related to priorities of the community to inform the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27*.

Phase four

This phase of community engagement involved sharing the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* (22 April – 28 April 2026) and *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* (22 April – 6 May 2026) for community feedback.

Community feedback was sought online through Council’s *Engage Whittlesea* platform and through direct conversation and activities at community pop-ups and meetings with Council Advisory Groups. The *Engage Whittlesea* platform utilises an accessibility add-on which allows users to easily switch to screen reader mode and adjust settings such as font size, colour contrast, and dyslexia friendly options, and enhancing overall site accessibility. The platform also has an in-built translation tool to mitigate language barriers to participation, allowing the page to be translated into the top fifteen languages spoken within the municipality. A QR code was included on all project collateral, directing the community to the project page as well as a URL for those unable to scan the QR code.

Community was presented with key points from the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* and *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* as well as access to the full draft documents. The community were encouraged to provide feedback on the draft documents online through the *Engage Whittlesea* project page or at community-based pop-ups.

A quick poll was available on the project Engage page that enabled participants to indicate their support of the drafts with yes, no and unsure options available. Participants at community-based pop-ups were able to undertake the same activity on large activity boards that posed the same questions and possible responses.

The community were able to provide further feedback on the drafts by making a submission for the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* and provide further comments about the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* through the *Engage Whittlesea* project page. Those that made a submission on the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* could also elect to speak in-person to their submission at the Hearing of Submissions meeting

During this phase the project team hosted an additional four community-based pop-ups in high foot traffic areas as per below:

Date	Time	Where	Address/location
Thursday 23 April	10am – 12pm	Whittlesea Services Hub (street front)	63 Church St, Whittlesea

Friday 24 April	2pm – 4pm	murnong Community Centre	183 Olivine Boulevard, Donnybrook
Monday 27 April	11am – 1pm	Lalor (outside One Way bakery)	348 Station Street Lalor
Friday 1 May	10am –12pm	Westfield Plenty Valley	415 McDonalds Road, South Morang

At the pop-up stalls, participants were encouraged to vote yes, no or not sure on whether they support the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* and *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* and comment further. Participants were provided with the key highlights of the drafts on an A1 board (refer to Appendix 1). There was also opportunity to comment or converse with our project leaders at the pop-ups, with subject matter experts available at all sessions. A flyer with a QR code directing community to the Engage page was available for those who chose to read the plans and participate online.

Below are the activity boards that were used at the community-based pop-ups throughout phase four.

As well as community pop-ups, the project team presented at Council’s Seniors Club Liaison Meeting, which brought together 71 members representing 38 senior clubs on Friday 24 April 2026. The team also presented to the City of Whittlesea Youth Council at the scheduled meeting on Monday 4 May 2026, sharing the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* for feedback and encouraging participation in the online engagement.



Above: images from the community-based pop-ups in Lalor, Donnybrook and Whittlesea

Promotion

The community engagement was promoted through a range of strategies to have a widespread reach across the municipality including:

- Council’s digital engagement platform *Engage Whittlesea*
- social media – we shared four posts across Council’s channels (Facebook and Instagram) with 29,826 views
- direct email to key stakeholder groups
- discussion at a range of Advisory Group meetings
- flyers and posters at Council facilities and libraries
- media release



Above: promotion of engagement opportunities

Phase Four Participation

Proposed Budget 2026-27 - a total of 141 contributions were made throughout phase four of community engagement, 46 of which were captured at community-based pop-ups and 95 online.

Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27 - a total of 62 contributions were made throughout phase four of community engagement, 46 of which were captured at community-based pop-ups and 16 online.

The project team also distributed 80 flyers at the community-based pop-ups, encouraging people to visit the project Engage page to provide feedback online.

Snapshot of community participation for proposed budget and draft community action plan

Below is a snapshot to community participation through the fourth phase of community engagement.

Downloads



265 downloads of the Proposed Budget 2026-27 and 112 downloads of the Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27

In-person activities



Hosted four in-person activities

Digital engagement



Engage Whittlesea platform saw
2304 views
1222 visitors
111 contributions (95 for Budget and 16 for CAP)

In-person participation



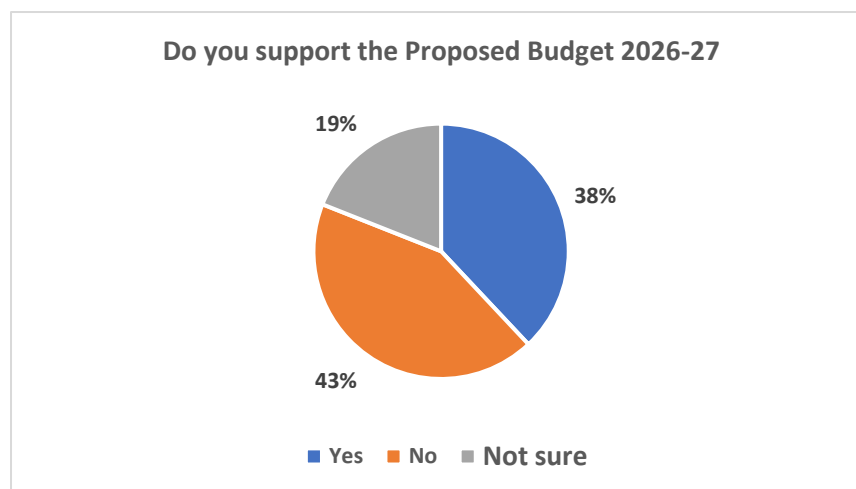
46 in-person contributions

What we heard

Proposed Budget 2026-27

A total of 136 people indicated whether they supported the *Proposed Budget 2026-27*, either through the online survey (95) or in-person at a community-based pop-up (41). The majority (95) of these were shared through the online submission process, 27 of which requested to be contacted, and seven who requested the opportunity to speak in support of their submission at the Hearing of Submissions Committee meeting scheduled for Tuesday 5 May. Of the seven who elected to speak, four took the opportunity to attend the Hearing of Submissions Committee meeting and spoke to their submission.

Overall, 38% of participants indicated that they were supportive of the *Proposed Budget 2026-27*, 19% were unsure and 43% indicated they were not supportive.



Above: Graph showing level of community support for the *Proposed Budget 2026-27*

Those that were not supportive of the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* (total of 62% of participants – 43% not supportive and 19% unsure) identified the main reasons as summarised below:

- no funding for aquatic component of regional sports precinct in Mernda – 53 comments related to this
- Mill Park Football club was seeking upgrades to infrastructure at Redleap Recreation Reserve – a representative spoke at the Hearing of Submissions meeting
- Lalor Bowling Club seeking funding
- Lalor overlooked for funding – one comment related to this
- rate rises – three comments related to this topic
- Youth Hub cost too high – one comment related to this and this was heard at the Hearing of Submissions
- proposed cost for PRACC was too high – one comment related to this
- a preference for Council to spend money on roads and rubbish – two comments related to this
- Doreen RSL – one comment related to this
- funds for Planning and Building – one comment related to this topic.

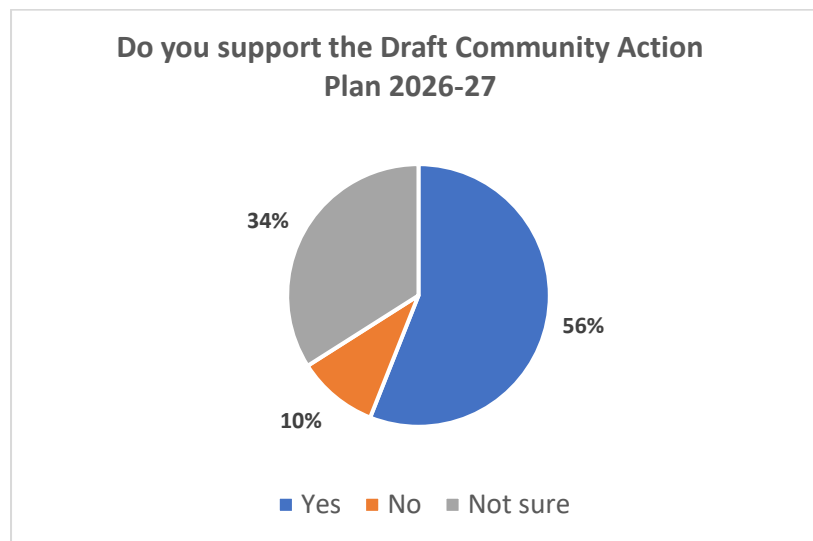
Hearing of Submissions meeting

Four of the seven that elected to speak to their submission attended the Hearing of Submissions meeting. Two were supportive of the Proposed Budget 2026-27 and two were not. Those that were supportive spoke to their support of the plan and its commitment to community wellbeing, service access, and long-term planning for a growing municipality, while also highlighting the opportunity to work more proactively in the space of rough sleeping across the municipality as well as the opportunity to refit toilet facilities at Kelynack Reserve to make them more suitable for females to increase participation.

The two submitters that were not supportive of the Proposed Budget 2026-27 spoke about the need for infrastructure upgrades at Redleap Recreation Reserve; and the other the opportunity to leverage off a partnership to run a youth service.

Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27

A total of 62 people indicated whether they supported the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27*. Forty-three of these participated in-person at one of the community-based pop-ups and the remaining 16 participated through the online survey. Overall, 56% indicated they were supportive of the draft, 34% were unsure and the remaining 10% indicated they were not supportive.



Above Graph: level of support for the Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27

Those that were not supportive of the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* (total of 44% of participants – 10% not supportive and 34% unsure) identified the main reasons as summarised below:

- **Belief that cultural connection outcome does not match its assigned priority**

The strategic priority linked to “*Our community strengthens connections between diverse cultures*” is seen as misaligned with the actual outcome.

Residents suggested the focus should be on connections between all cultural groups given our diverse community.

“Why doesn't council assign a Strategic Priority and Action that really responds to the heart of this outcome, particularly the words ‘strengthens connections BETWEEN’....

Social cohesion is super important for our country this decade. I don't believe council is meeting community expectations, and challenge council to find a different priority and action that responds to the spirit of this objective”

- **desire for broader cultural recognition and celebration**

Community suggested using council communications channels and community opportunities (i.e.: pop-up stalls and events) to highlight and educate about major cultural celebrations across the community (i.e.: Lunar New Year, Easter, Eid, Diwali etc).

Others suggested the need to sensitively acknowledging culturally significant dates that have become contentious or discontinued, such as Australia Day, noting that some new Australians still value these celebrations.

“I am married into a family of new Australians who like to celebrate their new country and get confused by the social stigma of this”

- **perceived slow progress on the regional sports precinct in Mernda as well as the lack of pool**

Multiple participants expressed disappointment the project has been discussed for years with little visible progress.

“Local council needs to prioritise Regional Sports Precinct in Mernda for kids and families”

- **perception that older suburbs are being overlooked**

Some participants feel the plan focuses too heavily on newer suburbs, with Mill Park mentioned as missing out on investment. Regarding sporting facilities for instance, participants shared that areas such as South Morang, Mernda and Doreen already have many sporting reserves close together, and that existing reserves in older suburbs are ageing and need upgrades to be safe, compliant and inclusive.

One participant opposed the proposed upgrade to Ashley Park Recreation Reserve in Doreen, seeing it as a lower priority compared with reinvesting in established areas where demographics are shifting and young families are returning.

“I would like some of the older playgrounds in Mill Park updated e.g. cnr Redleap & Moorehead Dve, Hinkler Dve and Hurlstone Cres - all need upgrading”

Several participants that supported the plan (56% of total participants), took the opportunity to provide feedback on priorities, needs, and concerns across the municipality. Responses highlighted strong support for many proposed initiatives, alongside desire for improved facilities, better communication, and more equitable service delivery across suburbs.

Some of the reasons participants identified as why they supported the draft plan are summarised below:

- **strong alignment with community needs**

Participants appreciate that the plan includes social inclusion, arts and culture and local events. Others expressed gratitude around more parks, sustainable living initiatives, and local events. The plan’s focus on inclusive community services (i.e.: disability support, kindergartens, sports precincts) is seen as beneficial.

“It’s looking great! Thank-you for always seeking the opinions of you rate payers. Can’t wait to see more parks, sustainable living and events”

- **positive feedback on Council community engagement**

Participants value the genuine community engagement undertaken to involve them in the planning. Others

“I really do admire the great work council does in actually committing resources to engage the community”

- **support for advocacy areas**

Participants agree with advocacy priorities, particularly improved bus services, affordable housing, and research into illegal dumping.

“I think the Community Action Plan outlines some good Council-delivered initiatives (e.g., Affordable Housing projects, illegal dumping research) as well as good opportunities for advocacy (e.g., improved bus services). I think the document could benefit from more clarity on who Council is advocating to for certain actions, as this would help residents understand where we can best direct our attention to support and build on advocacy led by Council”

Some participants who indicated that they support the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026 -27*, also took the opportunity to raise concerns around the following:

- **importance of maintaining existing facilities**

Some participants shared concern that the maintenance of existing facilities is not prioritised as part of Connected Community Key Direction 2.

“My main concern is around the lack of discussion around the importance of existing facilities in certain parts of the document. For example, maintaining existing sports and recreational facilities and delivering kindergarten at existing services...as a member of a tennis club committee...I worry that there is not enough support to ensure the facilities we use are maintained to a standard that people feel safe playing at them - and not just through capital works, but through a proactive asset management system that emphasises preventative maintenance”

- **technology and the use of AI**

There was concern shared around the organisation use of AI with reference to the introduction of a chatbot on Council’s website. Specifically, there was concern related to proper use, privacy implications and the need for the information to be pulled only from internal documents to ensure it is accurate for residents.

“I have concerns around how a chatbot on Council's website would be delivered as part of High Performing Organisation Key Direction 1...”

- **safety issues in specific areas**

Participants took the opportunity to raise safety concerns specific to their local area including lighting in reserves and speed limits.

- **communication tools, particularly for those that do not have access to the internet**

Some participants shared the need for Council to utilise both print and digital communications channels as not all residents have access to the internet.

“I would like to remind Council of the importance of keeping the Senior residents within the City of Whittlesea up to date and informed of what is happening within their Council. Many Seniors are not computer literate, or have family who have the time to find out things”

What we heard from Seniors

Council also presented the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* to 71 community members representing 38 seniors’ clubs at the Seniors Club Liaison meeting on Friday 24 April 2026 at Civic Centre. There was strong overall support for the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27*, with the document well received.

What we heard from Youth Council

On the 4 May 2026, the City of Whittlesea Youth Council broadly endorsed the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27*. The group felt the document was accessible but due to the detailed nature could find themselves lost in the detail, suggesting the use of bolding of key themes to draw the eye.

Many of the priority actions aligned to their priorities and they especially liked some of the social inclusion and mental health support actions.

Overall insights

Community feedback on both the *Proposed Budget 2026–27* and the *Draft Community Action Plan*

2026–27 showed strong engagement and a generally constructive tone, with many residents recognising Council’s efforts to listen and plan for a growing community.

While views on the budget were mixed, the most significant concern raised by participants was the absence of funding for the aquatic component of the regional sports precinct in Mernda. This issue dominated feedback, with 53 comments. Other concerns were more isolated but included dissatisfaction with funding allocations for specific clubs and suburbs, rate rises, and a desire for greater investment in core services like roads and waste.

The *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* received majority support, with participants appreciating its focus on social inclusion, arts and culture, sustainability, and improved services. Even among those who raised concerns feedback was largely solution-focused and aimed at strengthening the plan. Supportive participants highlighted the plan’s alignment with community needs, praised Council’s engagement approach, and endorsed the advocacy areas identified. The City of Whittlesea Youth Council also offered positive endorsement, noting the plan’s accessibility and strong alignment with their priorities.

Overall, the community’s input reflects a desire for equitable investment, continued transparency, and steady progress on long-standing projects, while recognising the positive direction of Council’s planning for 2026–27.

Next Steps

Thank you again to everyone that participated in the community engagement online or in-person. The information captured through the community engagement will inform the finalisation of the *Proposed Budget 2026-27* and the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27*. Your valuable insights will also inform the development of other key plans and strategies including the Economic Growth Strategy 2026-35.

The *Proposed Budget 2026-27* and the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27* will be presented for consideration and endorsement by Council at the scheduled Council Meeting on 16 June 2026. The final documents will be shared with community via the [project engage page](#).

Appendix 1 – A1 boards used at community-based pop-ups



Let's talk

City of Whittlesea

DRAFT COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN 2026-27

Key projects proposed to be delivered in the next year include:

- Connected community**
 - Continue construction of the **Regional Sports Precinct, Mernda**
 - Complete construction of **West Wollert Community Centre**
 - Commence construction of **Derby Meadows Preschool and Children's Centre, Epping**
 - Continue construction of **Yan Yean Pipe Track, Mill Park**
 - Complete the **streetscape upgrade of The Boulevard, Thomastown**
- Liveable neighbourhoods**
 - Delivery of **local road restoration and resurfacing**
 - Commence the **intersection upgrade of Findon Road and The Great Eastern Way, South Morang**
 - Commence construction of **Edgars Creek Recreation Reserve Sporting Facility, Wollert**
 - Commence construction of **Ashley Park Recreation Reserve Sporting Facility, Doreen**
 - Ongoing programs to **upgrade playgrounds and landscaping**
- Strong local economy**
- Sustainable environment**
- High performing organisation**

Draft Budget 2026-27 includes:

- Invest **\$353 million** to continue delivering more than **140 services** to our community
- Invest **\$25 million** on **transport network improvements** across our community
- Invest **\$34 million** to construct and renew **parks, open spaces and streetscapes**
- Allocate **\$28 million** for **family, children, youth and aged services**
- An average **rate increase of 2.75%** in 2026-27, in line with the Victorian Government's **Fair Go Rates System cap**




DRAFT BUDGET AND DRAFT COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN 2026-27

Do you support the Draft Budget 2026-27?

Yes	No	Not sure

Do you support the Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27?

Yes	No	Not sure

Do you have any other comments?

Appendix 2

Snapshot of demographics

Below is a snapshot of the diversity of participation in the community engagement in-person and online for the *Draft Community Action Plan 2026-27*:

Gender Identity



32% Female, 68% Male

Multicultural Communities



31% of participants spoke English as a second language

Suburb



Participants came from suburbs across the municipality, with the highest participation coming from South Morang (18%), Whittlesea (18%) and Mernda (16%)

LGBTIQA+ community



3% participants identified as members of the LGBTIQA+ community

People with disabilities



24% participants were people with a disability and or carers

First People



3% participants identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander