

21.02 MUNICIPAL PROFILE

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21.02-1 General Overview

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The City of Whittlesea has been traditionally characterised by its rapidly expanding residential areas and its continuing focus as an urban growth area. Although the City will continue to be an urban growth area in the future it also needs to manage the challenges of existing urban areas undergoing change.

Located on the urban rural fringe, the City of Whittlesea is fortunate to have the full spectrum of urban and rural land uses. The diversity in land use, including significant employment areas and activity centres, residential communities, farming activities, township communities and educational and other community uses is matched only by the diversity in landscape character. Existing diversity in land use categories and the potential for new development is a strength of the City of Whittlesea. The allocation of growth areas and the relationship between areas reserved for other purposes will continue to require careful management to ensure there is an overall level of compatibility. Incorporation of elements of the natural environment within future growth area planning is of vital importance to enable the City to enhance its image in all land use categories.

21.02-2 Locational and Regional Context

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The City of Whittlesea is located on Melbourne's metropolitan fringe, approximately 20km north of the CBD. Covering 490 square kilometres, it is a large municipality containing established urban, growth and rural areas. The City includes the major rural centre of Whittlesea, the rural localities of Beveridge, Donnybrook, Eden Park, Humevale, Kinglake West, Wollert, Woodstock and Yan Yean as well as the established and growing urban suburbs of Bundoora, Doreen, Epping, Lalor, Mernda, Mill Park, South Morang (including Quarry Hills) and Thomastown. The adjoining municipalities are the Shire of Nillumbik to the east, the City of Hume to the west, the Cities of Banyule and Darebin to the south and the Shires of Murrindindi and Mitchell to the north.

The City of Whittlesea is the third fastest and largest growing municipality in Victoria and the sixth largest in Australia. It has been endorsed by the Victorian State Government as a growth area of metropolitan significance. The population is expected to reach 300,000 by 2030, with growth concentrated in the developing areas of Mernda-Doreen, South Morang, Epping North, Wollert and Donnybrook/Woodstock. Growth has been rapid in the newer, developing suburbs, since 2001. In 2015, the City's population is approximately 194,500 and is expected to grow by 69% over the next 20 years.

The Wurundjeri Willum people were the original inhabitants of the area and are the traditional owners of this land. Today the City of Whittlesea has the fourth highest Aboriginal population in metropolitan Melbourne.

Plenty Road and High Street/Epping Road form the major north-south transport routes through the City and a series of routes such as Mahoneys Road, Settlement Road, McDonalds Road, Findon Road, Cooper Street and Donnybrook Road cut across the City in an east west direction. These routes link the City of Whittlesea to the adjoining municipalities and the remainder of the metropolitan area. The Metropolitan Ring Road traverses the southern section of the City and provides an important passenger vehicle and freight link to the Hume Highway, Craigieburn Bypass, Central Business District, Melbourne Airport and the Port of Melbourne.

The major transportation corridors and convenient access to central Melbourne and other employment centres has provided incentives to locate major state infrastructure projects in the City. The relocation of the Melbourne Wholesale Market to Epping and the proposed Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal will be significant infrastructure and employment generators for the municipality.

The three highest industry sector employers in the municipality are manufacturing, retail trade and health care and social assistance. More than 50% of local residents work outside of the municipality.

The Yan Yean and Tourourrong reservoirs and water supply catchment areas occupy a substantial portion of the north eastern part of the City. These areas, apart from supplying much of Melbourne with water, incorporate sites of flora and fauna significance. In conjunction with the Kinglake National Park, Mount Disappointment State Forest and the Plenty Gorge Parklands they provide significant environmental benefits and provide opportunities for recreation and tourism where controlled visitor access is possible.

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Key Issues

Settlement

As one of Melbourne's fastest growing municipalities, meeting the demands of a rapidly expanding population is one of Whittlesea's greatest challenges. In addition to meeting the needs of new residents and expanding population in growth areas, the City also puts in place strategies to combat the changing demographic trends in established areas.

The provision of physical and social infrastructure in a cost effective and timely manner is of paramount importance. Growth area planning in this context often relies on individual developments contributing to infrastructure. As such, the City continually strives to set in place mechanisms to require, apportion and administer funds that are appropriate to ensure that infrastructure is provided and maintained in a sustainable manner.

In particular, the City requires resolution of long term strategies to ensure that land reserved for residential, industrial and commercial development is suitably serviced.

Activity Centres play a vital role in the provision of access to a range of goods, services, employment and, housing choice, and depending on their size and location, a range of community activities. Activity centres often also have an important part to play in the development of public transport routes and interchanges and the establishment of associated land uses. It is essential that existing and future residents of the City of Whittlesea are provided with a range of accessible activity centres which fulfil their employment, social and recreation needs.

With changes to the Urban Growth Boundary in 2010, detailed planning is occurring for a number of future precincts which will accommodate a population of over 150,000. These future precincts will either be largely self-contained or be in close proximity to nearby Metropolitan or Major Town Centres.

Rapid population growth has also required careful management and delineation of the boundaries between land reserved to accommodate growth and land set aside for rural or conservation purposes.

Approximately 60% of the land in the municipality is within the identified "Green Wedge", which is the non-urban land within the municipality and is intended to be protected from urban encroachment. Bushfire hazard is a significant characteristic across much of the northern part of the municipality due to the settlement pattern, hilly landscapes, the type, extent and structure of vegetation cover, and climatic conditions and summer weather patterns. In these areas the risk to human life is considered a priority consideration.

Environment and Landscape Values

The City of Whittlesea is characterised by an abundance of natural features that contribute greatly to the attractiveness and amenity of the region. The northern parts of the municipality comprise state forests, national parks, grasslands of national significance, recreation areas, water catchments, extensive rural areas, red gum woodlands, elevated

landscapes and a network of rivers, creeks and drainage lines which extend into the urban areas.

The City of Whittlesea contains many diverse and rich urban and environmental features which have been identified for preservation and enhancement in order to retain the character of the municipality in the face of rapid urban development.

Particular emphasis has been placed upon the identification of the 'values' of the non-urban areas which contain these features both in the Whittlesea context and the wider northern region. Incremental incursion into these areas beyond the boundaries of land reserved for future urban development must be avoided to ensure long term preservation and enhancement of the character of the City of Whittlesea.

A key visual landscape feature of the municipality is the extent of mature River Red Gums. Many of the River Red Gums within the urban areas have been estimated to be between 200-800 years of age. Maximising the protection of River Red Gum habitat in the urban, future urban and non-urban areas is a key feature in the design and development in the City.

The City advocates for growth to not physically encroach into significant environmentally sensitive areas so that environmental assets are retained for future generations. Continual effort is required to ensure the identification of environmental values, including consideration of on-going management requirements. Key areas where continued improvement is required are in the treatment of waterways, both from a water quality and abutting development perspective. Additionally, ongoing objectives include minimisation of vegetation removal, the impacts of pest plants and animals and emphasising the benefits to be gained through energy efficient design.

Natural Resource Management

Water Management

The City is contained within the catchments of three major watercourses; the Plenty River, the Darebin Creek and the Merri Creek. These watercourses and their tributaries require careful management, particularly in urban areas where stormwater can cause risks to water quality, and flooding. Of increasing importance is the establishment of the water management infrastructure to retard and treat stormwater and sewerage in a manner which is both environmentally and economically sustainable.

Increasingly, Melbourne Water as the main authority responsible for water management is favouring the establishment of wetlands systems to control water quality prior to discharge. While this type of drainage control can be accommodated within growth areas on the basis of a drainage scheme, existing areas where there are known drainage problems including lack of capacity and water quality issues require on-going site specific measures to improve performance. Where integrated water management solutions are identified in association with drainage schemes, the City carefully consider impacts on the surrounding development and spatial allocation of other land uses and activities, in particular open space.

It is accepted that drainage facilities often incorporate some capacity for opportunistic and incidental leisure activities. However, it is important that these areas are not included within open space contributions attributable to the development as this undermines the principal purpose of the land and creates shortfalls in useable unencumbered open space.

Built Environment and Heritage

Housing character and variation in built form is closely linked to the period of development and cultural background of residents. There are a variety of building styles ranging from the timber and brick homes characteristic of the 1950s and 60s through to the larger

mission brown houses characteristic of the 1970s to early 80s. More recent housing development includes a mix of more contemporary design and period reproduction homes.

Housing provision in newer estates is increasingly required to become more varied to meet the needs of a diverse and changing population. Alternative forms of housing such as row houses or terraces, multi-unit development and various house sizes can be found throughout the older suburbs where redevelopment opportunities are available. Newer estates also present opportunities where diversity is increasingly being incorporated in subdivision design. These alternative forms of housing add interest and vitality to existing and new urban areas and reflect a ‘maturity’ of the Whittlesea housing market.

Whittlesea’s cultural heritage contributes greatly to the identity of the City. It is essential that significant heritage places are protected, retained and integrated as the City develops. As an identified Growth Area the municipality faces a number of challenges as it seeks to protect and manage heritage places in unique contexts including established, rural and greenfield areas. The City of Whittlesea is committed to conserving and enhancing heritage and recognises that it is an integral part of all planning processes.

Housing

While the City continues to attract a large proportion of young families, there is also a growing ageing population. As a result, it is essential that the housing needs of a more diverse cross section of the population are planned for. This will help cater for the needs of new residents but also to accommodate the needs of existing residents looking to move within the City, or age in place. Movements within the City account for a substantial proportion of all housing demand. Residents have a strong tendency to move in an outward direction along the major transport corridors. The City acknowledges the vital role that it can play in influencing the type of residents that are attracted to the municipality through housing provision. Diverse housing forms bring long term diversification in demographic composition and create interest and identity within urban areas.

Council faces the challenge to accommodate a variety of housing in growth areas and to accommodate change in existing areas to match future demographic changes. Character is an important element in all urban areas. In this context the City places a strong emphasis on ensuring that redevelopment and infill development proposals respect and add to the character of existing urban areas.

At the same time, in “high change” precincts nominated for more intensive infill development, such as in activity centres and along public transport routes, it may be appropriate to nominate a preferred urban character in order to achieve increased development densities, whilst ensuring that amenity impacts to existing residents are minimised. Planning for developing urban areas must also be respectful of, and incorporate elements of, the natural environment where ideally housing forms and styles of subdivision should be influenced by, rather than being imposed upon the natural environment.

Complete and vibrant communities require a holistic response to affordability, amenity and quality of life. Affordable living should encompass the provision of infrastructure (including quality leisure and open space assets) and services in addition to easily accessed social and economic opportunities. High quality design should provide attractive and walkable neighbourhoods that use spaces to encourage recreation and social gathering.

Economic Development

The City of Whittlesea is fortunate to have large tracts of land which have been developed, or reserved for employment generating purposes and other areas that have been set aside for the development of future employment uses. The City is well represented in manufacturing, warehousing and distribution activities. Industrial and other employment generating activities, however, are currently spread disproportionately across the City. The traditional industrial estates in Thomastown and Lalor have been progressively developed

with few remaining infill opportunities. Generally these areas are focussed on declining sectors of the economy and have a poor visual amenity.

Prospects for future development are good based on anticipated levels of population growth and other locational advantages and increasing levels of home based business and telecommuting.

The location of significant State Infrastructure, such as the Melbourne Wholesale Market in Epping and the proposed Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal will also generate economic opportunities for the local economy.

To foster increased growth in employment generating activities the City has supported the reservation of land for employment purposes in the following major locations:

- Epping Central Metropolitan Activity Centre,
- Cooper Street Employment Area, including the Melbourne Wholesale Market,
- Plenty Valley Town Centre,
- Mernda Town Centre,
- University Hill,
- Wollert Town Centre and Wollert Employment Area,
- Beveridge Interstate Freight Terminal,
- Lockerbie Metropolitan Activity Centre, and
- Thomastown Industrial Area.

Planning for identified growth areas aims to achieve a high level of self-containment with employment land being provided where appropriate and as identified in Precinct Structure Planning and Development Plans. Further opportunities for future employment areas are located within the Northern Quarries Investigation Area which was identified as part of the North Growth Corridor Plan.

Proximity and access to Melbourne Airport provides competitive advantages for the municipality.

Planning for urban growth and employment aims to safeguard the on-going operation of Melbourne Airport and curfew free operations.

The City sustains long-term employment growth within a diversity of sectors through progressively upgrading the appearance of employment centres and increasing the choice and location of land available for employment generating activities.

In keeping with wider objectives to diversify the demographic profile of residents the City also ensures that there is diversification in employment opportunities, including home based employment in home businesses and telecommuting.

Planning for employment growth with easy access to future residential areas and activity centres is essential for the City to continue developing effective focuses for the establishment of higher order goods and services. An opportunity exists to expand upon education and health facilities including, RMIT University, Melbourne Polytechnic, Northern Hospital as well as within Precinct Structure Plan areas as opportunities arise. Additionally, there may be opportunities in the future to leverage off the proposed La Trobe National Employment Cluster by maximising the synergies between similar uses along Plenty Road. Similarly there are substantial leveraging opportunities that could strengthen and link the existing competitive advantage of the Cooper Street Employment/Melbourne Wholesale Market area and the Thomastown Industrial Area and adjoining employment areas in the City of Hume. These areas could provide new opportunities within the food industry, including the wholesaling, packaging, distribution, food technology and food manufacturing.

Transport

The road network within the City of Whittlesea consists of a grid of north-south and east-west main roads. These roads are spaced approximately two to five kilometres apart and are predominantly two lane contra flow roads, however a number have been planned to accommodate duplication in the future.

The municipality is also serviced by the Hume Freeway which is a major strategic transport corridor (part of the Auslink National network) providing access for road freight to Sydney, Canberra, Albury-Wodonga and Brisbane.

Proximity to Melbourne Airport, the main gateway to Victoria also provides access to air freight and other growth opportunities.

North-south road capacity is currently severely limited beyond the City and east-west road links are discontinuous particularly at their eastern and western terminuses due to natural land features such as the Plenty River and the Merri Creek. The network of internal collector and lower order roads offers a varying level of connectivity throughout the municipality. To a large extent the level of connectivity is influenced by approaches to subdivision design and models of urban development. Notably, connectivity in the eastern half of the urban areas in Mill Park, and to a lesser extent Bundoora, is constrained by a curvilinear road design which causes movements to become indirect and overly reliant on the arterial road network.

Public transport within the municipality includes heavy rail along the South Morang Line (which is planned to be extended to Mernda in the next few years) and light rail along Plenty Road which extends to McKimmies Road. These high capacity networks are complemented by a series of bus services, including two SmartBus routes. Public transport services in existing residential growth areas of Epping North and Mernda-Doreen have not kept pace with urban development.

The lack of north-south road capacity and continuous east-west routes in the established parts of the municipality pose a significant constraint on the future growth and development of the City. The allocation of future residential growth opportunities and their relationship to land reserved for short and long term employment growth continually increases the need for, and incidence of, east-west movements across the municipality and to neighbouring municipalities. These movements are important for private car based travel, freight movements and public transport routes. Improving the capacity and connectivity of east-west and north-south transport routes is a priority.

Planning for the extension of the existing heavy and light rail services remains essential to the ultimate successful integrated development of the City. While it is accepted that extensions to the metropolitan heavy and light rail systems do not occur ahead of demand, the likelihood of extensions can be enhanced by two principle factors. Firstly, land must be set aside to accommodate the extension and, secondly, planning for beneficial land uses in proximity to interchanges and routes must occur. Subdivision design and land use patterns must also incorporate opportunities for the introduction of public transport. Efforts are being directed toward the introduction of a public transport corridor to Wollert, trunk bus services, along our east-west and north-south corridors and aligning public transport services with community needs and with other forms of transportation such as bicycle routes. Similarly, a high level of connectivity within and between subdivisions is endorsed by the City to enhance the effectiveness of transportation networks generally.

Community Wellbeing

Many factors influence community wellbeing and make a location a place where people want to live, including personal, social, physical, economic and environmental factors. As a growth and interface municipality there are wide-ranging liveability challenges as a result of rapid population growth. This places increasing pressure on existing infrastructure and services and creates a strong demand for new infrastructure and services.

Council is committed to enhancing community wellbeing through building social and physical infrastructure that facilitates community connections, generates social capital and enables residents of all ages to undertake daily activities. Council is committed to fostering partnerships with community services and business organisations to achieve the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes for the whole community.

Council has identified a deficiency in the provision of justice related facilities in the northern region, which should be appropriately accommodated in the proposed Plenty Valley Town Centre Civic Precinct.

The logical and orderly staging of development is crucial to ensure the timely delivery of affordable infrastructure and services. Council recognises the need to support community infrastructure in other locations within Precinct Structure Plan areas, including the provision of tertiary education facilities and community health facilities. Given the scale and importance of the Lockerbie Metropolitan Activity Centre within the context of the northern growth corridor, it is the preferred location for higher order regional facilities such as a hospital and tertiary education/university. Opportunities for the provision and location of other regional health and education facilities should also be investigated as part of the planning and implementation of future precinct structure plan areas.

