

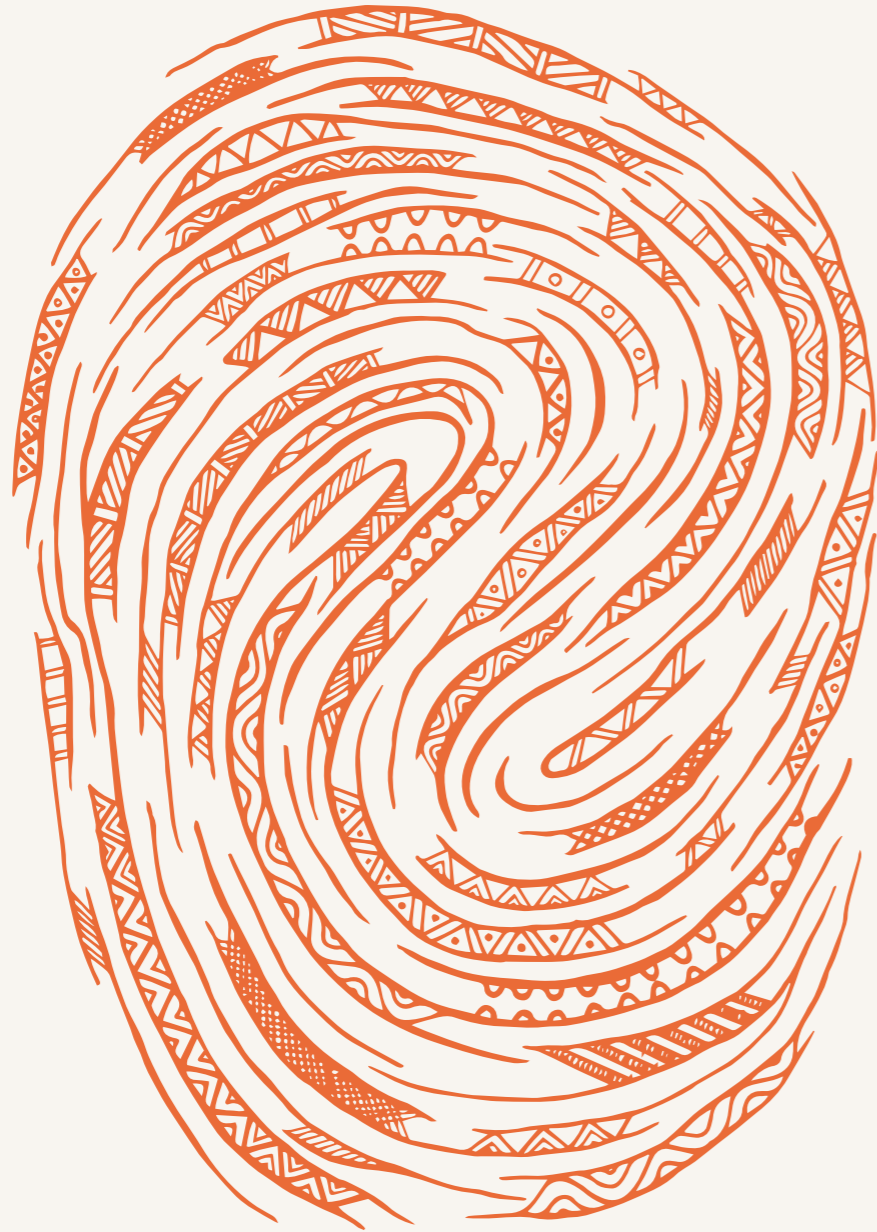
City of Whittlesea

Creative Plan

2025–2030



City of
Whittlesea



Artwork © Mandy Nicholson, 2017

Acknowledgement

The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage of this Country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri-willam clan and Taungurung people as the Traditional Owners of this place. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Executive summary

The Creative Plan 2025-2030 outlines the City of Whittlesea’s direction for arts, culture, and events.

We believe everyone engages with culture every day of their lives and that everyone has the capacity to be creative.

Arts, culture and events reflect who we are in this moment in time, and in this place from the music we listen to, to the stories we read our children at night, to the festivals, exhibitions, concerts, and creative workshops we attend.

The Creative Plan has been informed by community consultation, research, and trend analysis. The Creative Plan responds to the needs and aspirations of the community and is articulated into four key priorities for the future:

Our vision is to nurture a thriving creative community, where residents have joyful experiences, express themselves, and celebrate their culture close to home.



Fundamentals

the resources required for creativity to flourish, including networks, grants, opportunities, professional development, and support to the creative industries.



Spaces

the spaces and places required for creative activation, arts, culture, and events.



Voices

the opportunities to enable individuals and groups to engage, express themselves, and find their creative voice.



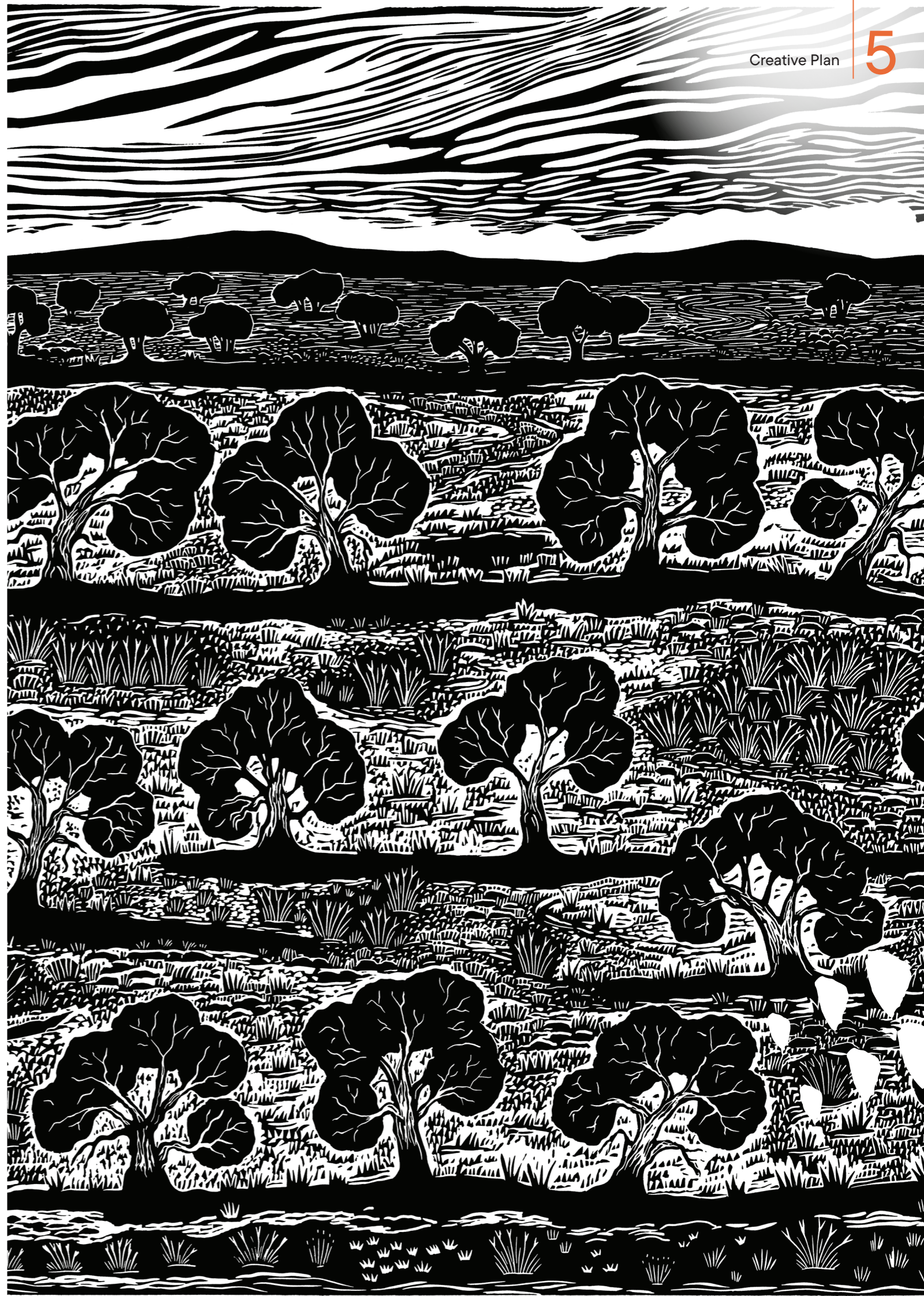
Experiences

the programs, festivals and experiences that allow the community to enjoy, connect, and enrich their lives.

We know that participation in arts, culture, and events improves health and wellbeing, fosters community pride, contributes to the local economy, and promotes inclusion and social cohesion. By pursuing these outcomes, this Plan contributes to Council’s most important commitments to its community.



RIGHT: Anita Laurence, Wollet-Grasslands, 2025



About the City of Whittlesea

The City of Whittlesea is located in Melbourne's northern suburbs, about 20 kilometres from the city centre. It is one of Melbourne's largest municipalities, covering a land area of approximately 490 square kilometres. A city in its own right, with a thriving and growing economic base, it includes rural areas to the north, the emerging neighbourhoods and suburbs in the greenfield areas and the established suburbs to the south.



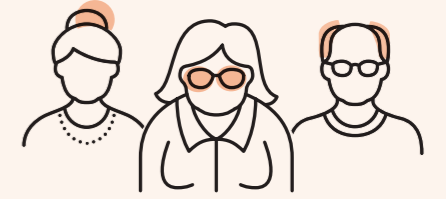
Our population continues to grow

A population of **257,000** in 2025, projected to be **355,000** by 2040 – a 38% increase.¹



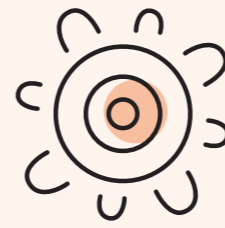
We're home to many young families

54% of households are families with children. **27%** of the population is under 19.²



We have a growing older population

17% of our population is over 60. Our median age is expected to shift from 35 to 39 by 2040.³



We have a growing First Peoples population

38% increase from 2016 to 2021.⁴



We're a diverse and multicultural community

37.6% of residents were born overseas and **45%** speak a language other than English at home.⁴



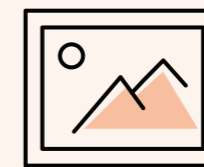
Discrimination is impacting the lives of many in our community

More than half of First Peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse residents have experienced racism.⁵ **1 in 10** Australians experience discrimination because of a disability.



Performances

PRACC welcomed **94,000** visitors in 2024.



Visual Arts

Council's visual and cultural collections consist of over **2,500** objects.



Festivals and Events

On average each year **61,250** people attend City of Whittlesea's festivals and events.

¹ Population projections for City of Whittlesea from .id, 2024

² ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021

³ Population forecast, Place Info Pty Ltd, 2025

⁴ Population forecast, Place Info Pty Ltd, 2025

⁵ City of Whittlesea Anti-racism community Project, Vic Uni, 2022

What is the creative community and why does it matter?

Arts and culture are central to everyday life. Creative work and experiences reflect who we are as individuals, as a group of people, in this time and place.

We work on the principle that everyone has the potential to be creative, and our role is to reduce barriers to access and engagement with cultural experiences.

We know participation in arts and culture has a positive impact on building community pride, civic participation, inclusion, health and wellbeing, and resilient local economies.⁶

People recognise this impact in their everyday lives. For example, in the most recent National Arts Participation Survey, 97% of Australians engaged in the arts, and 84% acknowledged positive impacts of arts and creativity.⁷

In the City of Whittlesea, 86% of residents surveyed find access to artistic, cultural, and lifestyle community events and activities important.⁸ Perhaps this is why arts, culture, and events featured in the top five priorities for community in the 2025 Community Priorities survey.⁹

When people come together to enjoy arts, culture, and events, they build social connections and strengthen bonds with friends, family, and strangers. Shared art and cultural experiences deepen relationships, foster a sense of belonging, and create lasting memories.

These moments not only enhance individual connections, but also contribute to improved wellbeing and increased social cohesion.¹⁰ In this way, arts and cultural experiences support some of the highest-level strategic commitments of the City of Whittlesea: a healthy and safe community, a participating community, and a socially cohesive community.¹¹



⁶ Creative Victoria, The Arts Ripple Effect: Valuing the Arts in Communities, Melbourne; Davies et al. Good Arts, Good Mental Health: the effectiveness of an Australian health promotion media campaign in promoting community mental wellbeing via the arts, Sec. Public Mental Health, 13, 2025; <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1594846>

⁷ Creative Australia (2022), National Arts Participation Survey.

⁸ Silverlining Strategy (2021), Community Research, City of Whittlesea.

⁹ City of Whittlesea (2024), Community Priorities Survey.

¹⁰ Creative Australia (2022), National Arts Participation Survey - Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey.

¹¹ City of Whittlesea (2023), Connected Community Strategy 2023-2033.

Industry analysis

These experiences rely on a sustainable arts and cultural sector. We know the creative and performing arts sector in the City of Whittlesea has experienced substantial growth, especially since Covid-19 lockdowns, while the industry in Greater Melbourne overall is relatively stable.

The creative and performing arts sector in the City of Whittlesea added an estimated \$4.56 million to the local economy in 2023-24.

The creative and performing arts sector in the City of Whittlesea is growing as an employer, offering a 6.4% increase in employment from 2021-22 to 2023-24.¹²

We also know that paid employment data represents only a small part of the value of the creative sector, partly because so many cultural creators work for little or no financial reward.¹³

Recent creative workforce scoping commissioned by Creative Victoria identified workforce shortages across performing arts, visual arts, craft and design, digital games, screen, and music in Victoria.¹⁴

This data demonstrates that there are significant opportunities emerging for the City of Whittlesea's growing creative sector.

¹² National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR), 2025. Compiled and presented in economy.id by .id (informed decisions).

¹³ Creative Australia (2024), Artists as Workers: A summary and response by Creative Australia, May 2024, available from https://creative.gov.au/sites/creative-australia/files/documents/2025-03/3654_Creative-Australia_Companion-Report_V6_0.pdf

¹⁴ Creative Victoria (2025), Creative Workforce Scoping Study Report: Addressing the challenges with critical skills and sustainable careers, Summary Report, 2025 available from creative.gov.au



Lucy and Katira,
Many Stories, One Place, 2026

Council's role

Council as an organisation plays many roles to support arts and culture:



Provider

Council funds and provides spaces for artists and local community groups to present arts, cultural experiences and events through its community grants program, PRACC, and other Council facilities. Council initiates and presents arts, culture, events and festivals programming.



Facilitator

Council collaborates with presenters, practitioners and organisations, to co-produce and present arts and cultural experiences. Council has an authorising role particularly in relation to events including the provision of event permits and food permits.



Advocate

Council advocates to other tiers of government related to long-term investments and strategic opportunities to serve the needs of City of Whittlesea's creative communities.

The Creative Plan identifies the ways in which City of Whittlesea can most effectively nurture creativity across each of these varied functions.

How we built the plan

To build the Creative Plan we sought ideas, feedback and thoughts via engagement opportunities including onsite activities, surveys, and a community reference group. This led to over 300 submissions.

We targeted our consultation to ensure we received a broad cross section of the community across the municipality. We held in-person focus groups with young people, First Peoples, and with practicing artists and creatives to shape the Creative Plan.

We asked questions designed to understand what creative activities people currently participate in and what they would like to see more of in the future. The questions related to the types of events people have attended, their creative pursuits, what motivates them to engage with arts and cultural activities, and the creative industries.

We also conducted an extensive literature review, including research published by Creative Victoria and Creative Australia. We reviewed and benchmarked against comparable Creative Plans and Action Plans from local governments across Australia and internationally.

Snapshot: what we heard

In this research we heard that the top five motivators for the City of Whittlesea's community to enjoy arts, culture and events were:



48%

to have fun and be entertained



47%

to be creative and express themselves



42%

to learn something new



39%

to meet new people and socialise



36%

to relax and unwind

In the last 12 months, participants most frequently engaged with:



67%

festivals or outdoor events



46%

film and cinema



42%

music, events, gigs, or concerts



40%

food festivals



40%

theatre or musicals

We asked our creative business community what support they need to elevate their creative or professional practice. They answered they most want to see:



57%

opportunities to exhibit or perform



50%

increased funding



40%

more creative workshops

These and other insights gleaned from our engagement informed the priorities of this Creative Plan.

Policy context

Strategy and policy work across federal, state, and local government provides context for the City of Whittlesea’s strategy and development of arts, culture, and events.

In the development of this Creative Plan, officers have reviewed

- Creative Australia’s Corporate plan 2024-28
- Creative Victoria’s Creative State 2028
- Creative strategies and plans comparable local Councils.

Integrated Planning Framework



The Creative Plan also supports other Council strategies including:

Liveable neighbourhoods **Connected community** **Strong local economy** **Sustainable environment** **High performing organisation** **Community infrastructure** **Aboriginal Action Plan**

Opportunities and challenges

Growing community

The City of Whittlesea is a growing community. By 2040, the City of Whittlesea's population is expected to increase by more than 60% as we welcome around 8,000 new residents each year. This growing community is home to the second largest First Peoples community in metropolitan Melbourne. The City of Whittlesea is also one of Victoria's most culturally diverse local government areas. In combination this creates an opportunity to provide culturally appropriate creative infrastructure, programs, and experiences that meet the need of a complex and diverse community.

Cost of living

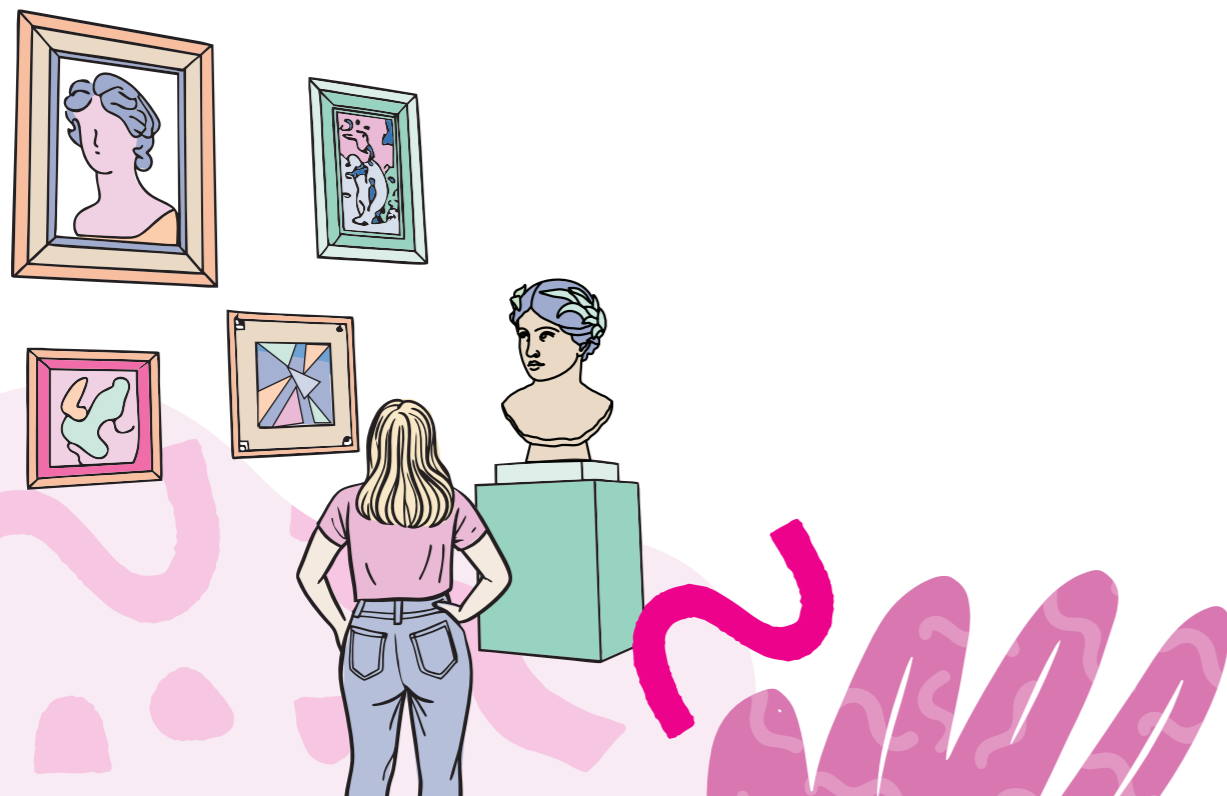
Financial hardship, which is exacerbated by cost of living increases, has significant impacts on residents. Financial pressures can lead to tension in relationships, mental health issues, job vulnerability, and social pressures. Council's opportunity is to reduce as many barriers to participation as possible, particularly for our most vulnerable community members. We will provide free or low-cost arts and cultural activities to help alleviate these pressures.

Strengthening the creative community

Creativity exists in our everyday lives. Residents are creative for fun and personal enjoyment, or on a professional basis. Creative practice can be a solitary activity people pursue in the home, for example woodworking, crafts, sewing, or playing music. Equally, creative practice can bring people together, strengthen the creative community, and create transformative experiences. To advance creativity in the future, we will ensure there are strong networks to advocate for and champion the value of arts and culture for the benefit of future generations.

Demand and appetite

Our research and consultation revealed a strong demand and appetite for cultural activities. For example, attendance at festivals and events is high, but people want these experiences to occur more frequently and for them to be available in their own neighbourhoods. While the theatre at PRACC is heavily used and valued, high demand makes it difficult for new groups to access the space, limiting opportunities for the wider community. There is a demonstrated appetite for local access to a variety of creative opportunities and a clear recognition that participation in these activities has a positive impact on the individual and community.





Artist: Kee'Ahn

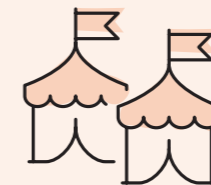
Priority areas

We will work across four priority areas to strengthen creative communities in the City of Whittlesea. These four priority areas work as an ecosystem, where each activity supports another.



Fundamentals

the resources required for creativity to flourish, including networks, grants, opportunities, professional development and support to the creative industries.



Spaces

the spaces and places required for creative activation, arts, culture, and events.



Voices

the opportunities to enable individuals and groups to engage, express themselves, and find their creative voice.



Experiences

the programs, festivals, and experiences that allow the community to enjoy, connect, and enrich their lives.



Priority Area 1

Fundamentals

Introduction

A thriving creative ecosystem depends on a range of interconnected elements, including funding, skills development, and accessible creative opportunities. As our municipality grows, it is essential to build a strong foundation to support the sector's long-term success. This involves providing ongoing support to local arts and creative organisations, nurturing grassroots initiatives, and fostering partnerships and networks that amplify creativity across the community.

Investing in the creative sector also contributes to the local economy and employment, offering residents new pathways to develop their skills, and turn their artistic passions into sustainable careers. By providing funding and opportunities for artists and creatives, Council will empower individuals and groups to produce their own creative works, festivals, and uplift the creative industries. This approach strengthens the creative expression, engagement, and connections that will ensure arts and culture remain a dynamic and valuable part of the municipality's ongoing growth.

Our ongoing work

- Facilitate Creative Arts Practitioners of Whittlesea (CAPOW), a network of artists sharing opportunities and skills.
- Provide professional development workshops for CAPOW members.
- Support and guidance for community-led festival organisers and event permits.
- Provide Community Grants for arts, cultural, events and community activities.
- Provide platforms for creatives to sell their handmade and original creations at markets and festivals.
- Provide paid opportunities for visual artists and performers at festivals.
- Circulate the Creative Catch-Up newsletter with creative opportunities.

Snapshot – Community Grants

Each year, Council supports community development by awarding grants to local organisations and individuals. Council has supported multicultural festivals that unite the community, such as Chinese New Year, Diwali, The Colour Run, and That's Amore Annual Ricotta Festival, which celebrate the municipality's diversity. Council also offers regular workshops and information sessions on how to write and complete grant applications, helping applicants maximise their chances of success. With this support, community-led organisations are empowered to bring people together, fostering celebration, fun, and social connection.



Priorities for the future

Creative industries

By mapping and planning for the needs of local creative industries, Council can create opportunities for growth, build capacity and economic development in the creative industries.

Throughout the City of Whittlesea, designers, artists, musicians, makers, digital artists, and other creatives work professionally to develop creative products and ideas into commercial works. We refer to these as the creative industries. These industries contribute to the local economy by creating paid employment opportunities while delivering cultural benefits to the municipality.

Funding

By connecting artists, creatives, and event organisers to Community Grants and other funding, Council can offer residents creative opportunities led by local artists with authentic voices and perspectives.

Council provides community grants year-round to individuals, organisations, and businesses to support local programs, events, and initiatives that benefit the wider community. While there are strong examples of community-run festivals and multicultural events, there is potential for growth in financial support to artists and community to deliver creative works, programs, and projects. Consultation with the creative sector¹⁶ revealed that 50% of artists consider access to grants essential to their practice. Securing external grants and fostering partnerships with local artists positions Council to enhance resources, opportunities, and paid work within the local creative sector. Additionally, there are opportunities for Council to apply for grants from other government bodies and not-for-profit organisations to fund projects delivered by local artists.

Networks

By facilitating strong networks with local artists, Council can galvanise community connections, build opportunities for collaboration, and strengthen the creative sector in ways that support future initiatives.

Collaboration between artists sharing ideas, exchanging approaches, and discussing their creative processes can be a powerful way to expand artistic practice. Networking allows artists to elevate their work, share ideas, reach wider audiences, and achieve more meaningful outcomes. While Council currently facilitates the CAPOW network, there are opportunities to support a range of other networks, from small local groups to larger professional networks.

Creative opportunities

By increasing paid opportunities for artists to connect with community, exhibit, perform and sell their work, Council can support artists to grow and advance their practice.

In our engagement process with artists, event organisers, and the creative industries, 57% of respondents¹⁷ highlighted the need for more opportunities to exhibit, perform, and sell their creative work, as well as grow, and advance their practice. To thrive, artists also need meaningful ways to connect with the community. This can include artists in residence programs, artist markets, events, showcases, digital directories, and art in public spaces.

Cohesive approach

By aligning our communication channels, networks, databases, and connections, Council can deliver more impactful and accessible services to benefit the wider community.

Council offers a range of opportunities for artists to be creative, and for residents to engage with cultural services. Working collaboratively, sharing knowledge, maximising resources, and leveraging existing networks provides cohesive and comprehensive support to artists.

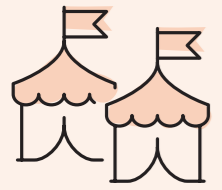
Professional development

By facilitating skill building with community festival organisers, professional artists, and hobbyists, Council can advance creative practice and creative careers.

Building a skilled and knowledgeable creative sector will enhance the quality of creative output for the community to enjoy. Training in areas such as business development, marketing, finance, and fundraising can provide artists with the solid foundations needed to sustain and grow their work whilst uplifting their creative outcomes.

¹⁶ City of Whittlesea (2025) Creative Plan, Phase 1 Engagement Summary.

¹⁷ City of Whittlesea (2025) Creative Plan, Phase 1 Engagement Summary.



Priority Area 2

Spaces

Introduction

Arts and culture play a vital role in shaping vibrant and connected communities. For them to truly thrive, they need suitable, accessible spaces and infrastructure, where creativity can flourish. Investing in creative spaces close to home also increases the livability of neighbourhoods. There is a clear community demand for spaces to enable artists to showcase their works and be creative. Opportunities exist to meet this need through traditional gallery spaces, maximising existing infrastructure, newly built and refurbished spaces, and outdoor settings. In growth areas and as more people call the City of Whittlesea home, we'll need to plan for arts and ensure creative opportunities exist to enhance their connection to place.

Visible arts, culture, festivals and events in suburbs and townships can breathe new life into areas, making them more attractive, welcoming, and vibrant places to live. Public art and creativity that is visible in the streets has the power to transform these areas, turning them into living canvases that reflect local identity and foster a sense of belonging. Festivals and activations provide opportunities for community participation and connections. When people see their environment enriched with art that reflects their stories, experiences, and hopes, they are more likely to feel proud of where they live.

Our ongoing work

- PRACC, our flagship creative venue for performances and events.
- Improvements to the technical provision at PRACC.
- Ownership and operation of Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum & Heritage Garden.
- Install and maintain over 100 physical works of Public Art.
- Public Art map for self-guided tours.
- Over 30 Community Centres available for community and creative use.

Snapshot - Walking Thomastown

Walking Thomastown was born during the pandemic and out of the community's desire to rediscover the local area, promote fitness through walking, improve community safety, and address mental health challenges. Walking Thomastown exemplifies how partnerships with local community groups, Council and residents can address social issues by harnessing the power of creativity. Today, the festival features a 2km walk illuminated by art, visual projections, and neon lights, complemented by performances from local groups. Walking Thomastown is an example of delivering a festival in an unconventional way to have a positive impact on community, despite the lack of a suitable and accessible festival space.

Priorities for the future

Creative Infrastructure Planning

By planning for creative infrastructure and ensuring necessary projects are identified in the Community Infrastructure Plan, Council can provide adequate spaces for the City of Whittlesea's growing community.

As a growing municipality, it is essential that we plan for the future by ensuring residents have access to suitable and accessible spaces for engaging in arts and cultural activities. We will implement best-practice service, to identify the types and scale of creative spaces required to support, connect, and empower City of Whittlesea's creative communities. To do this, we will assess community need, make the most of existing assets, align investment with broader strategic plans, and strengthen our ability to attract support from partners and other levels of government. For example, there is an upcoming opportunity to include creative infrastructure in the Epping Central Structure Plan.

PRACC upgrades

By investing in capital upgrades, Council can transform PRACC into a vibrant, dynamic, creative hub that empowers local artists, nurtures creative industry growth, and provides a welcoming space for all to create.

The Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre is Council's flagship creative space, hosting professional, community, and school performances, as well as providing venue hire for meetings and conferences. Since opening in 1996 it welcomes approximately 94,000 visitors each year. While it remains a valued cultural asset, the facility is ageing and no longer fully meets the creative needs of the community.

Exhibition spaces

By investing in spaces for exhibitions, Council can provide central, professional platforms for artists at all stages of their careers.

A strong theme that emerged from the Creative Plan consultation was the lack of galleries and exhibition spaces across the municipality.¹⁸ This absence creates a significant barrier for visual artists, who are left without suitable spaces to display their work, build their professional profiles, or engage meaningfully with local audiences. There are other opportunities to address this gap by exploring alternative exhibition models. Vacant shopfronts, cafés, libraries, community centres, and outdoor spaces can all serve as dynamic platforms for showcasing art. Supporting visual art in this way would not only enrich the cultural fabric of the municipality but also foster stronger community connections and creative vibrancy.

Festivals Spaces

By reviewing available festival sites and investing in capital infrastructure, Council can host small, medium and large events in suitable outdoor spaces.

Place-based community festivals and events that are bespoke and reflective of the local area play a vital role in building strong, cohesive communities and fostering creative social connections. Successful festivals in parks, reserves, or open spaces require equitable access to essential infrastructure to accommodate events and festivals at a range of scales, from small activations in local parks to improvements at the Civic Lawns, our premier festival site. This includes parking, access to water and power, vehicle access, and accessible pathways.

Art in public places

By delivering quality public art projects, Council can celebrate local stories, strengthen community pride, and promote cultural inclusivity.

Public art refers to creative works displayed in public spaces, accessible to all. Public art is a powerful tool to enhance and activate townships, civic gathering places, retail districts, and open spaces. Well placed and thoughtfully designed public artworks contribute to the unique identity and character of an area, creating vibrant and welcoming environments for residents to enjoy. Beyond enhancing and beautifying the public realm, public art can increase foot traffic, boost the local economy, and foster a greater sense of safety. Embedding public art early in the scoping and design of new Council facilities, positions townships to showcase a lively and visible creative presence. This approach should reflect the diverse voices, histories, and cultures of their communities.



¹⁸ City of Whittlesea (2025) Creative Plan, Phase 1 Engagement Summary.



Priority Area 3

Voices

Introduction

Representation and authentic voices are crucial for sharing truthful and meaningful stories that reflect the rich diversity of our community. Supporting under-represented artists, including First Peoples and culturally diverse communities, allows a true reflection of the community's creative voices. We will support and deliver workshops and creative projects to encourage the community to participate in, learn, and explore different viewpoints.

We will encourage creativity both at home and in community spaces to allow individuals to find their voice and express themselves freely. We will support people to connect to their heritage, community, place and explore their own creativity. Our planning processes will focus on connecting with community and understanding people's motivations for engaging in the arts to ensure programs are meaningful and impactful. Our approach will be to support creative activities that genuinely resonate with the community and foster strong connections between artists, participants, and the wider community.

Our ongoing work

- Cultural development projects and showcases.
- Creative workshops and activities.
- Events and creative activities for youth and older people.
- Acquisition of artwork from diverse voices as part of City's Cultural Collection.
- Heritage trail map to showcase historic sites and stories.
- Celebrated culturally significant dates.
- Multicultural festivals and events.
- The development of the Aboriginal Gathering Place.
- Celebrated migrant heritage at Ziebell's Farmhouse & Heritage Garden.

Snapshot - CAPOW

The Creative Arts Practitioners of Whittlesea (CAPOW) is a network of over 250 people who are creative in various disciplines, at various stages of their creative career, from amateurs to professionals. Every quarter a networking or creative workshop event is organised to help connect the artists, to share ideas, upskill or promote their upcoming creative works.



Priorities for the future

First Peoples' voices

By working in partnership with Traditional Owners and local First Peoples community members, Council can nurture self-determination in First Peoples cultural expression, and build the cultural competence of all artists, participants and audiences.

Under the theme 'culture, respect and trust' the Aboriginal Action Plan commits Council to embedding First Peoples cultural heritage as an everyday consideration.

Everyone's voices

By actively seeking out artists from diverse backgrounds and removing barriers to participating, Council can provide avenues for City of Whittlesea's diverse community to flourish.

We are a growing municipality of richly diverse communities. Community members expressed a strong desire to connect, learn, and engage with their diverse community, which will foster greater social cohesion and vibrancy within the municipality.¹⁹ All members of our community should feel empowered and safe to find their creative voice. We will nurture, support and amplify everyone's voices, and represent cultural diversity, people with a disability, the LGBTQIA+ community, young people, older people, and everyone in between. We are committed to championing diversity through our creative programs, services, spaces, and communication strategies.

Everyday voices

By encouraging residents to be creative in their daily lives, in the home, or in the community, Council can nurture opportunities for people to share their creative voices at all stages of life.

Participating in creative activity allows the diverse voices of community to be expressed and shared. 53% of respondents in the community consultation stated they wanted to engage in arts and culture workshops to learn new skills. There is a strong desire for workshops in crafts, visual arts, performing arts, or health & wellbeing.

Connecting to community

By establishing an Arts Advisory Committee comprising community leaders, artists, and creatives, Council can better understand people's motivations, the barriers they face to engaging with creative services, and design responsive programs and to increase participation.

Council delivers a range of events, workshops, programs and projects for the community to participate and engage with. We strive to ensure our programs are relevant, connect to the community and are reflective of the people within the City of Whittlesea.

Communications

By using a data-driven approach to communications, Council can deliver more effective marketing and communication channels to connect with audiences and promote our programs.

Creative programming requires considered and specialised marketing and communication strategies to ensure we reach audiences and attract people to creative activity. Through the community consultation we now have a better understanding of what motivates local arts and cultural engagement.²⁰ We also have rich, valuable data available through Creative Victoria's Audience Atlas. This resource allows us to take into consideration the audience segments including demographics, the evolving habits and behaviours of audiences, and drivers to engagement.

"By understanding what people are seeking to fulfil in themselves through experiencing arts and culture, you can target them more accurately, engage them more deeply and build relationships to maximise loyalty and support."²¹

Through deepening our understanding of audience segments, we can devise marketing strategies to better appeal to different groups and audiences and to encourage more meaningful engagement. This data-driven approach to program design and communications will help increase attendance, engagement, and build stronger relationships with local audiences. We will tailor our approach to communications for each of our programs, create audience development plans and bring in specialised knowledge of arts marketing to drive audiences to creative activities.

¹⁹ City of Whittlesea (2025) Creative Plan, Phase 1 Engagement Summary.

²⁰ City of Whittlesea (2025) Creative Plan, Phase 1 Engagement Summary.

²¹ Audience Atlas Victoria 2024, October 2024. Page 7.



Priority Area 4

Experiences

Introduction

Engaging in arts, culture, and events offers more than entertainment—it provides opportunities for social connection and personal fulfillment. Whether through music programs, visual arts, festivals, performances, or heritage activities, these experiences help people come together. These shared experiences can help people feel connected to their community, with friends and family, or meet new people with shared interests. These social bonds not only build lasting memories but can inspire people to explore their own creativity.

Participating in creative activities also supports overall health and well-being, offering emotional, mental, and physical benefits. By offering low-cost, local events, we aim to remove barriers and make creativity accessible to all. These experiences not only enrich people's lives but also help them relax, unwind, and feel part of something meaningful. Ultimately, access to arts and culture improves quality of life, fosters cultural understanding, and promotes a healthier, more connected community.

Our ongoing work

- Prioritised free, low cost and local events and programs.
- PRACC performance program.
- The Annual Art Exhibition to showcase local artists.
- Develop, display and exhibit Council's Cultural Collection.
- Deliver heritage, creative and educational programs at Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum.
- Local pop-up events.
- Annual festivals – Carols by Candlelight, Community Festival and Walking Thomastown.

Spotlight – PRACC Performance Program

In 2025, we launched the PRACC Performance Program, the first professional performance series presented at the venue in over eight years. The program aimed to offer a diverse line-up of shows to appeal to the wider community. Audiences were invited to enjoy performances by some of Australia's favourite singers, captivating children's theatre, the artistry of opera and ballet, or be entertained by household names and up-and-coming comedians. This inaugural program was designed to test the market and gauge audience demand, with the intention of building on its success in future years.



Priorities for the future

Creative programs

By presenting creative programs that continue to broaden the experiences on offer, Council can broaden our audience reach and provide access to enriching, transformative experiences.

The City of Whittlesea provides a wide range of creative programs for people to enjoy year-round including performances at PRACC, events at Ziebell's, the annual art exhibition, and Council's annual festival and events program.

Festivals and events

By expanding its festivals and events offer, including established events and new initiatives, Council can activate public spaces, foster inclusion and a sense of belonging, and deliver insightful and joyful experiences for community members.

Our research indicates that 67% of residents attended festivals and events in the last 12 months.²² Festivals and events provide an excellent pathway for residents to engage in a rich and joyful cultural activity. We support the community to plan and deliver their own festival and events through our event permit program that contributes to a vibrant and diverse range of festivals.

Music – our soundtrack

By engaging musicians, and working with external partners, schools, private institutions and community groups to produce projects, Council can increase provision for music across the municipality.

Music is a powerful, wide reaching, and accessible creative art form. At its heart, music can transform the listener, instantly evoke emotion, and inspire people. Respondents to the community consultation indicated that music is a priority, expressing a desire to engage with music in diverse ways and across a broad range of genres. This includes music at festivals, in performance spaces, enjoying music in the public realm, learning how to play, and accessing spaces to record music.

Removing barriers

By designing inclusive programs and building strong partnerships, Council can improve access to arts and cultural opportunities for all members of the community.

Everyone should have the opportunity to access and enjoy the benefits of arts and culture. However, many people face barriers that limit their participation. In some cases, these barriers are compounded by inequity based on age, ability, gender, religion, socio-economic status, sexuality and gender identity or nationality. In others, individuals may simply feel that arts and culture are “not for them” or that they are “not creative enough” to take part.

There is no quick or one-size-fits-all solution to overcoming these challenges. Instead, they require a consistent, thoughtful, and systematic approach.



²² City of Whittlesea (2025) Creative Plan, Phase 1 Engagement Summary.

Making it happen

We are committed to measuring the impact of the Creative Plan, learning from our efforts over time, drawing inspiration from others, and clearly communicating our progress.

The Creative Plan will be delivered through annual actions. These actions will set clear targets and measures, and define the steps we will take to achieve our priorities.

We will undertake systematic reviews of our programs and services. These reviews will help inform and improve future projects. In addition, we will conduct annual reviews of the Creative Plan to monitor, analyse, and assess our progress on a consistent basis.

We will collect audience feedback and engagement comments to assess the quality and relevance of our work. Alongside this, we will track participation, attendance, and financial data to evaluate performance. We will measure our progress against the following areas of impact, with the aim of seeing continued growth and improvement over time.



Social

Interpersonal connections, health benefits, positive experience, connection to self.



Cultural

enhanced creativity, artistic quality, learning, cultural appreciation, inspired to create



Economic

removing barriers, paid creative opportunities, contribution to the local economy, skill development



Place

Connection to place, civic pride, environmental sustainability

Glossary

Creative Industries

Work (paid or unpaid) that combines creativity, culture, and technology to create economic and cultural value. This may include design, digital media, film, fashion, architecture, publishing, advertising, music, and visual and performing arts.

Arts

A range of human expressions intended to be creative, including visual arts, performing arts (such as theatre, dance, and music), literature, and new media.

Culture

The shared practices, values, beliefs, languages, customs, and creative expressions of a community or group. Culture evolves over time and includes tangible and intangible aspects. It encompasses the arts, traditions, cuisine, spirituality, and everyday life.

Festivals and Events

An opportunity for people to gather, enjoy and celebrate various cultural activities that are temporary that take place outside on Council land.

Heritage

The legacy of natural, built, and cultural assets inherited from the past and preserved for future generations. This includes historic buildings, sites, objects, stories, traditions, and First Peoples knowledge, which contribute to identity.

Public art

Creative works displayed in public spaces, accessible to all. Public art can take many forms—sculptures, murals, installations, digital media, temporary or permanent—and is often commissioned by local governments to reflect community values, celebrate identity, or enhance public environments.

Cultural development

A process that supports the growth of cultural expression and participation in a community. It involves nurturing creativity and fostering inclusion to strengthen social cohesion and local identity.

The City of Whittlesea's Cultural Collection

- The Cultural Collection comprises Council's visual art, civic history collections, public art.
- The Visual Art Collection comprises over 400 artworks and includes: paintings, drawings, prints, textiles, ceramics, photographs and small sculptures.
- The Civic History Collection comprises over 2,000 heritage items relating to the history and activities of the City of Whittlesea.
- The Public Art Collection includes over 100 works displayed in the public realm.

Engagement

The process of actively involving community members, stakeholders, and audiences in planning, creating, or experiencing cultural activities. Engagement helps ensure that programs reflect community needs, values, and aspirations.

Participation

The act of taking part in cultural or artistic activities—either as a creator, performer, audience member, volunteer, or contributor. Participation builds community connection, supports wellbeing, and ensures cultural initiatives are inclusive and accessible.

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