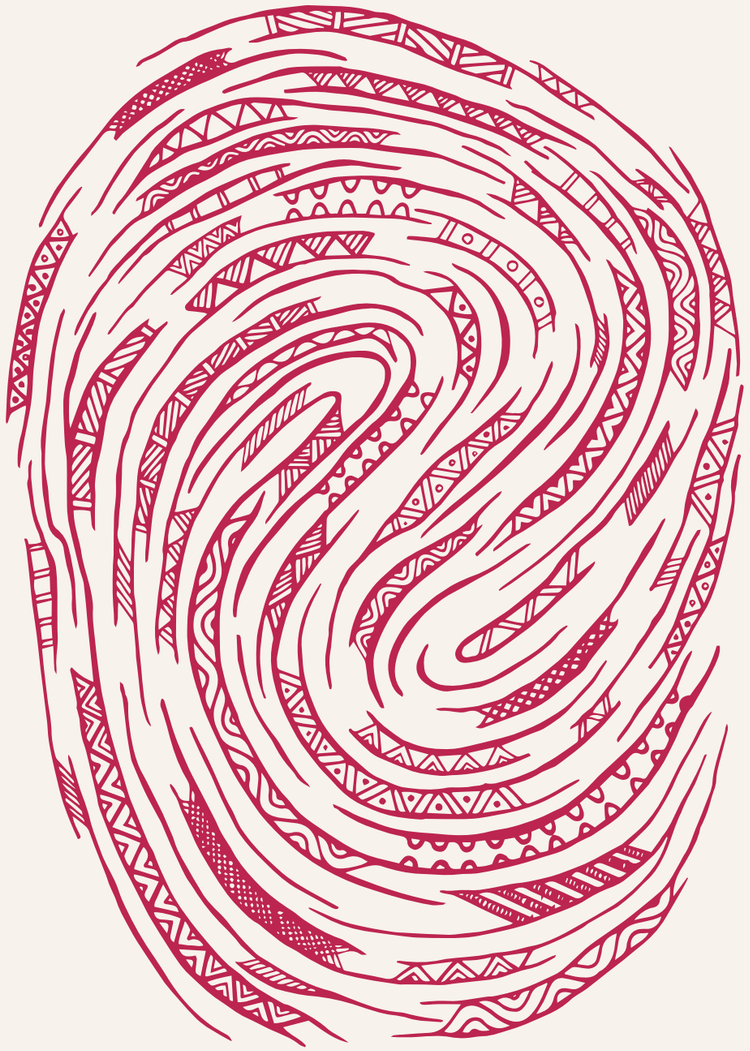
City *of* Whittlesea

ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY 2026-2036

City of Whittlesea

Whittlesea 2040

A place for all



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Acknowledgement

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

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FRONT COVER: Epping Health Precinct

University Hill Town Centre, Bundoora

Executive summary

A connected economy powering Melbourne's north

The City of Whittlesea is one of Australia's fastest-growing municipalities. Over the next decade, population growth will drive housing demand, infrastructure delivery and workforce needs, creating a significant opportunity to realise and enable a stronger and more competitive City economy.

With an estimated 270,000 residents in 2026 and forecasts of about 33 per cent growth to approximately 360,000 residents by 2036[1], the City of Whittlesea will play an increasingly important role in the economy of Melbourne and Victoria.

This pace and scale of change creates challenges, pressure and opportunities. The purpose of the Economic Growth Strategy (the Strategy) is clear: to strengthen the City's economy, expand opportunity closer to home, and build confidence in the places, partnerships and investments that will shape the City of Whittlesea's future.

The City spans about 490km^2, with established suburbs, expanding greenfield growth areas and about 60 per cent rural land. As growth continues, a diverse and affordable housing supply delivered alongside thriving city, town and neighbourhood centres and enabling infrastructure, will help attract and retain workers, support local business growth, and ensure the benefits of growth are shared.

Positioned for growth

Strategically located in Melbourne's north with strong economic precincts and infrastructure that supports jobs, services and investment, the City of Whittlesea is positioned for growth. State-significant and job-rich precincts position the municipality to attract new industry, grow local employment, deepen supply chains, and strengthen the City of Whittlesea's role in the regional and state economy.

Cultural diversity is a significant strength for our City that fosters entrepreneurship, expands workforce capability and connects the City to wider markets. Grounded in First Peoples' enduring connection to Country, Council is also committed to genuine partnership that creates pathways for First Peoples-led enterprise, cultural tourism and stronger procurement outcomes.

Federal and state government alignment

The Economic Growth Strategy supports Victorian and Australian Government priorities by strengthening the conditions for investment, productivity and job creation in one of Melbourne's fastest-growing municipalities. Through its focus on industry growth, business innovation, skills development and enabling infrastructure, the Strategy helps deliver shared state and federal objectives around economic resilience, workforce participation, advanced manufacturing, freight and logistics, digital capability, and sustainable economic growth. This includes alignment with the state government's Economic Growth Statement and Victorian Industry Policy, and the federal government's Advanced Manufacturing Statement and National Small Business Strategy. It also supports government efforts to grow priority industries, such as advanced manufacturing and health, attract investment and improve employment outcomes in growth areas.

By supporting employment precincts, improving skills pathways, fostering entrepreneurship, attracting business investment and promoting inclusive participation in the economy, the Strategy helps ensure that population growth is matched with economic opportunity. It positions the City of Whittlesea as a key contributor to regional and national economic growth while supporting more jobs closer to home, greater business competitiveness and a more prosperous, inclusive local economy.

A decade of opportunity

The Strategy identifies 10 opportunity areas where the City's scale and momentum can translate into investment confidence, stronger pathways to employment and better outcomes for the community.

1. Strengthen state-significant precincts and industry clusters by attracting the right industries, ensuring infrastructure and utilities are in place, and deepening supply chains.
2. Build investor confidence through high-quality, sustainable development with clearer approval pathways, earlier guidance and coordination with service authorities in key growth and employment areas.
3. Focus investment and local jobs in priority precincts by coordinating land-use planning, infrastructure, services and investment in locations with the scale and strategic importance to support growth and community benefit.
4. Unlock growth through enabling infrastructure and stronger connections by bringing forward critical transport, utilities, energy and digital infrastructure through advocacy, coordination and partnerships with government, service authorities and the development industry.
5. Strengthen attraction and advocacy for priority precincts and enabling infrastructure through a stronger investment story.
6. Lift local spend through vibrant centres and creative enterprise by supporting activation, stronger evening trade and paid opportunities for creatives and makers.
7. Connect skills to jobs and clearer career pathways by aligning training to demand and creating stronger routes into placements, apprenticeships and employment in priority precincts and growth sectors.
8. Grow local enterprise through small business and entrepreneurship with connected support to improve skills, systems and performance, grants, and safe adoption of digital tools and emerging AI.
9. Unlock shared prosperity through inclusive pathways including social procurement, partnerships, improved local supplier capability and better recognition of existing skills, qualifications and overseas experience.
10. Build long-term advantage through sustainable business growth by supporting resource recovery, decarbonisation and innovation that attract investment, strengthen supply chains and help businesses lift productivity, reduce waste and stay resilient.

The Strategy is structured around four key directions and outcomes:

Key direction 1:
Business growth and innovation

Our businesses are positioned to adapt to changing environments

Our businesses are supported and connected to thrive

Key direction 2:
Investment and infrastructure for industry growth

Our City is recognised as a strategic destination for investment

Our City is a growing contributor to the Victorian economy

Key direction 3:
Skills and knowledge for the future

Our residents have a variety of career and learning pathways

Our businesses have the skills and knowledge to remain competitive

Key direction 4:
Vibrant and inclusive economy

Our businesses meet the needs of our local community and visitors, strengthening our City as a destination

Our residents actively participate in our economy

Cooper Street and O'Herns Road employment precinct, Epping

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea's economy is building momentum. In 2025, the local economy generated $13.02 billion in gross regional product, supported by 23,735 businesses and 87,120 local jobs[2].

Our City's diverse economic base provides strong foundations for future growth, with health, construction, manufacturing, wholesale and retail continuing to play a major role.

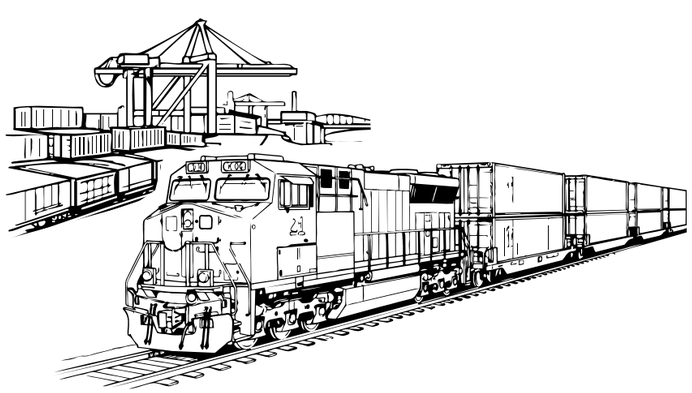
This Strategy sets the long-term direction for economic growth over the next decade. It outlines practical steps that Council, state government and industry can take to create local benefits by supporting opportunities to work closer to home, building stronger businesses, attracting investment, and ensuring broad participation in growth.

Implementation will occur through rolling two-year Economic Growth Action Plans commencing in 2026. Each Action Plan will identify Council initiatives, roles, timeframes and measures so priorities are clear, and progress can be tracked over time.

The Strategy will be reviewed in 2031 to ensure it remains aligned with community needs and changing economic conditions.

Further detail on how the Strategy was developed, how it aligns within Council's integrated planning framework, and how to use this document is provided in Appendix A.

Council's role is to help create the conditions for growth through planning and regulation, advocacy, facilitation and partnership. Achieving the outcomes of this Strategy will depend on coordinated action with businesses, investors, education and training providers, Traditional Owners, community organisations, industry bodies and all levels of government, supported by a clear and consistent story about the City of Whittlesea's future.



Our aspiration: future-ready precincts and opportunities close to home

By 2036, the City of Whittlesea will be recognised locally, nationally and internationally as a place where growth delivers opportunity, productivity and inclusion; where people and businesses can succeed; where our centres and precincts are connected and investment-ready; and where the local economy is resilient.

This Strategy is guided by *Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All,* which envisages a strong, resilient local economy where local businesses provide jobs for local people, where investment and technology are embraced, where residents can choose to live, work and prosper locally.

Laurimar Town Centre, Doreen

Growth that builds local prosperity: A vibrant City of Whittlesea

Economic growth in the City of Whittlesea is measured by productivity, job access, investment confidence and participation. Done well, growth expands local job choice, strengthens business resilience and capability, and delivers centres and precincts that attract investment and foster community connection.

As the City grows, Council will focus not only on the pace of growth, but on the value it creates for the economy and community. That means lifting productivity of businesses, strengthening workforce pathways into secure jobs, and increasing the share of spending and supply captured locally, so prosperity is broader, more resilient and more inclusive.

Economic growth also relies on strong fundamentals:

- liveable, well-functioning centres and neighbourhoods with appropriate densities
- amenity and safety
- efficient access to services, education and transport.

These conditions help attract and retain workers and industry, support higher local spend, and reduce uncertainty for investment decisions.

As the City grows, quality matters. The quality of development and public realm in each precinct, street and centre will shape how people experience the municipality and how investors respond to it. Well-designed places, diverse mixed-use precincts, stronger amenity and coordinated development do more than improve appearance. They build confidence, support local activity and strengthen long-term economic value.

Delivering a vibrant economy is a shared endeavour. Council sets conditions through planning, regulation, advocacy and facilitation, while outcomes are achieved with business, investors, education and training providers, Traditional Owners, community organisations, industry bodies and all levels of government. With coordinated delivery, growth can translate into stronger participation, more productive precincts, and greater opportunity close to home.

Key stakeholders

Working in collaboration for community benefit

Council's role

Economic growth is a shared effort, and Council's contribution is both direct and enabling. Council helps create the right environment for businesses and communities to thrive through planning and infrastructure, services and programs, advocacy, and local leadership.

The graphic below summarises the core functions Council performs to support business growth, employment pathways, investment readiness and broader economic participation.

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

Regulator/statutory authority/monitor
Council enforces laws, policies and regulations that maintain public safety, health and wellbeing.

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

Facilitator:
Council facilitates partnerships, connects stakeholders and ensure that local needs are heard and addressed.

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

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

A connected economy powering Melbourne's north

Economic opportunity

Melbourne's north is one of Victoria's most significant growth corridors, and the City of Whittlesea is at the centre of this expanding economic region. This position connects growing communities to metropolitan jobs, freight networks and emerging investment opportunities.

It also means the City's future is closely linked to how well people, goods and services move across municipal boundaries and through the wider northern economy.

The municipality's economy is part of a broader northern system of jobs, freight, services and supply chains across manufacturing, logistics and distribution. The next phase of growth is an opportunity to deepen this base, broaden the mix of jobs and support higher-value activity.

Major freight initiatives in Melbourne's north, including the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct, can also strengthen the region's strategic role in distribution and production. Regional partnerships such as the Northern Councils Alliance will also be important to coordinate investment, strengthen cross-border supply chains and improve how growth is shared across the north.

Over the next decade, connectivity to jobs, education, services and infrastructure across northern Melbourne will help shape the pace and quality of growth in the City of Whittlesea. This is not only about strengthening local opportunity, but also about improving how residents and businesses connect to the wider metropolitan labour market and the broader northern economy.

Regional access, cross-border connections and coordinated investment will all play an important role in how the benefits of growth are shared. The City of Whittlesea is committed to working in partnership with neighbouring councils to deliver shared outcomes that benefit the region.

Economic snapshot

Gross regional product[2]:
$13.02b

Contribution to Victorian economy[2]:

3.9% wholesale	3.5% construction
2.8% manufacturing	2.8% retail
2.7% health	

Major sectors by value-add[2]:

construction $1.647b	health $1.521b	wholesale $1.208b
manufacturing $1.065b	retail $0.84b	

Major sectors by local jobs[2]:

health 16,804	construction 12,251	education 9,630
retail 9,620	manufacturing 8,562	

Average annual growth rate (FY2022–2023 to FY2024–2025)[2]:
2.37% gross regional product
3.95% local jobs

Population and place

The City of Whittlesea is diverse, with a mix of established suburbs, rapidly developing growth areas and a substantial rural area to the north. This creates a distinctive mix of workforce growth, developable land and liveability features, while also shaping how residents move across the municipality and into the wider northern region for work, education and services.

Population growth is a defining economic driver. This expands the local workforce and increases demand for services, commercial activity and jobs, strengthening conditions for business expansion and new investment. It also increases the importance of planning for how residents access a broader network of employment, education and services across northern Melbourne as the region grows.

Housing diversity and affordability are strategic advantages for workforce attraction and retention. As growth continues, timely delivery of connections, infrastructure and services will be critical to maintaining liveability and improving access to jobs and opportunities across the municipality and the wider region.

Working in partnership with neighbouring municipalities will also be important to improving access to jobs, services and infrastructure across the region. This includes enhancing city centres such as Epping, town centres, and future city centre catchments such as Cloverton, where residents benefit from a wider and better-connected network of opportunities.

Community snapshot

Median age[3]:
35 years

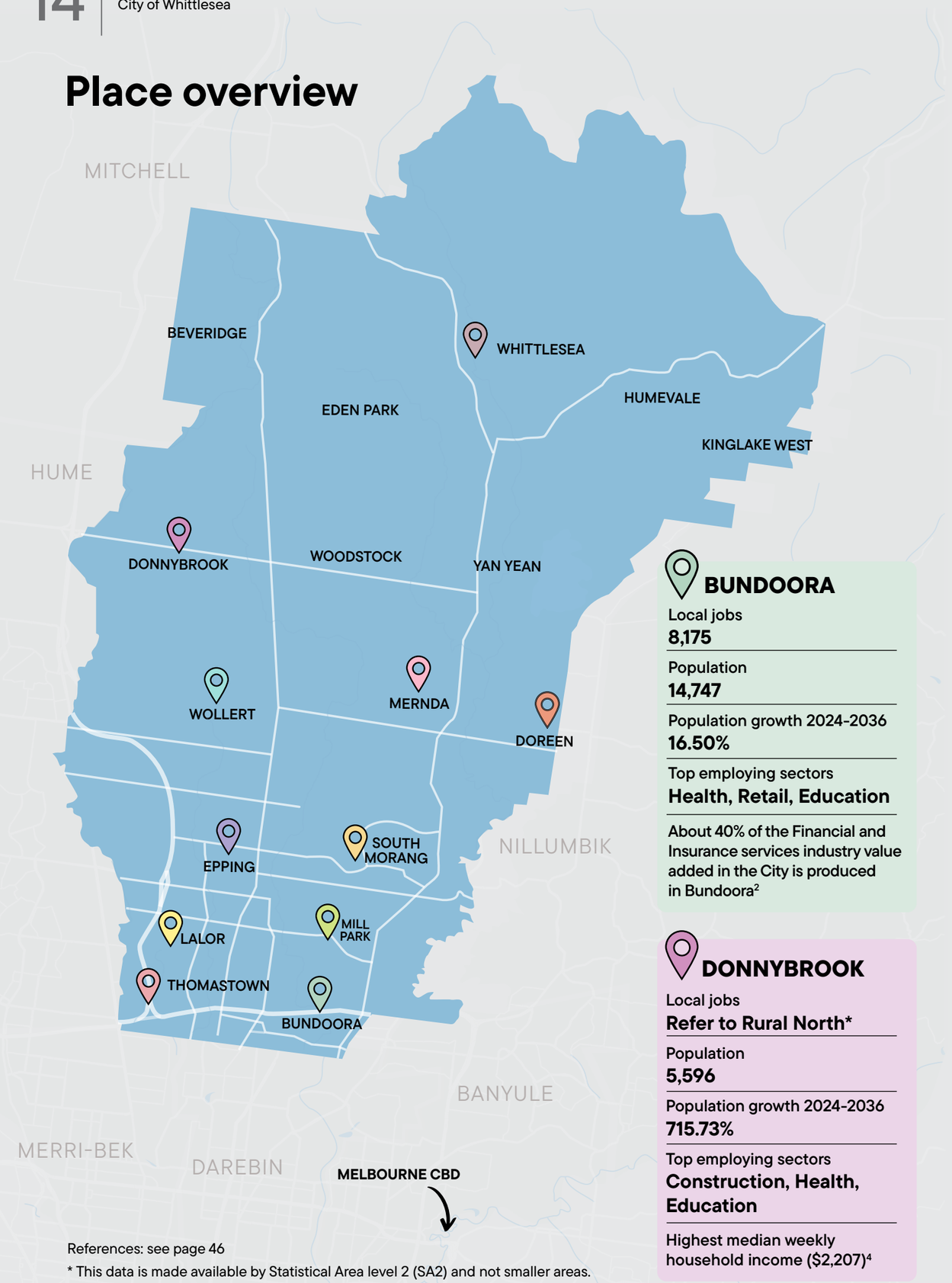
Population born overseas[4]:
44%

Top 10 languages other than English spoken at home[4]:
Arabic, Macedonian, Punjabi, Italian, Greek, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Hindi, Malayalam, Sinhalese

Residents with a Vocational (VET) or higher qualification[4]:
51%

Employed residents[5]:
health 17.97%
construction 10.76%
manufacturing 9.97%
retail 9.77%
education 8.21%

Place overview



References: see page 46

* This data is made available by Statistical Area level 2 (SA2) and not smaller areas.

BUNDOORA

Local jobs
8,175

Population
14,747

Population growth 2024-2036
16.50%

Top employing sectors
Health, Retail, Education

About 40% of the Financial and Insurance services industry value added in the City is produced in Bundoora[2]

DONNYBROOK

Local jobs
Refer to Rural North*

Population
5,596

Population growth 2024-2036
715.73%

Top employing sectors
Construction, Health, Education

Highest median weekly household income ($2,207)[4]

DOREEN

Local jobs
4,423

Population
29,041

Population growth 2024-2036
6.60%

Top employing sectors
Health, Construction, Education

Highest percentage of people 15+ in the labour force (72.7%)[4]

EPPING

Local jobs
24,035

Population
34,821

Population growth 2024-2036
28.12%

Top employing sectors
Health, Manufacturing, Retail

Highest number of local jobs (20,277)[4]

LALOR

Local jobs
5,244

Population
23,932

Population growth 2024-2036
9.40%

Top employing sectors
Health, Manufacturing, Retail

77% of visitors spend money within the Food Retailing sector (supermarkets and grocery)[6]

MERNDA

Local jobs
3,202

Population
25,564

Population growth 2024-2036
13.96%

Top employing sectors
Health, Construction, Retail

1.4% of the population identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander[4]

MILL PARK

Local jobs
7,851

Population
29,028

Population growth 2024-2036
5.96%

Top employing sectors
Health, Retail, Manufacturing

60% of visitors spend money within the Tourism and Entertainment sector (restaurants, cafes, takeaway and fast-food outlets)[6]

RURAL NORTH

(Beveridge, Eden Park, Humevale, Kinglake West,Whittlesea, Woodstock, Yan Yean)

Local jobs
3,114

Population
10,215

Population growth 2024-2036
5.76%

Top employing sectors
Construction, Health, Education

Beveridge: 'Anticipated 9,800 direct jobs and ~12,600 indirect jobs over the next 10-20 years'[7]

SOUTH MORANG

Local jobs
5,257

Population
25,950

Population growth 2024-2036
18.83%

Top employing sectors
Health, Construction, Retail

Generates almost one-third of its total economic value-added from the Public Administration and Safety sector[2]

THOMASTOWN

Local jobs
21,083

Population
20,720

Population growth 2024-2036
12.33%

Top employing sectors
Health, Manufacturing, Construction

Highest number of small (18%) and medium (36%) businesses[2]

WOLLERT

Local jobs
2,810

Population
33,578

Population growth 2024-2036
107.20%

Top employing sectors
Health, Transport, Manufacturing

Greatest percentage of tertiary education completion 31.8%[4]

A City positioned for growth

As a City in its own right, the City of Whittlesea's growth advantage is grounded in a set of state-significant and job-rich locations with capacity to grow.

These include:

- Epping City Centre and its health and knowledge cluster
- Cooper Street Employment Area
- Melbourne Market
- Resource Recovery Hub, Epping
- Thomastown Industrial Precinct
- Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and the Northern Freight Precinct
- University Hill Town Centre
- Plenty Valley Town Centre.

Together, these locations give the City of Whittlesea a distinct role in health and knowledge services, freight and logistics, food and beverage, manufacturing (including advanced and specialised production), construction, resource recovery, and higher-value industry. They provide strong foundations for investment, job growth and deeper supply chains, while reinforcing the City's importance to Melbourne's north.

Epping's health and knowledge cluster is a particularly important long-term differentiator for the City of Whittlesea. Its strength lies not only in existing health activity, but in the opportunity to grow a broader mix of specialist care, allied health, education and training, and complementary services. This gives doctors, specialists and health providers access to a rapidly growing northern catchment, stronger workforce pathways and a location with capacity to grow as the cluster expands. Epping is emerging as a high-quality mixed-use city centre, with staged development being delivered with significant public realm and amenity.

Positioned about 20km from Melbourne's CBD, the City of Whittlesea is at the gateway between metropolitan Melbourne and the broader northern region. This location connects growing communities to major labour markets, freight routes and emerging investment opportunities. Key transport corridors provide access to strategic gateways including Melbourne Airport and the Port of Melbourne, helping link local businesses and employment precincts to regional, interstate and global markets.

This strength is matched by a business base with local, national and international reach. Micro and small businesses anchor centres and neighbourhoods across the municipality, while larger employers and industrial operators are embedded in metropolitan and regional supply chains.

Cultural diversity is another economic strength of the City of Whittlesea. It supports entrepreneurship, strengthens workforce capability and builds connections to wider markets. These strengths are reflected in local business activity, including in places such as Lalor, where local enterprise contributes to a distinctive food offer, stronger community connection and a broader mix of business and visitor experiences.

The City of Whittlesea's strengths also extend to sustainability and innovation. The state-significant Resource Recovery Hub and wider industrial base provide a platform for resource recovery and sustainable business growth. This strengthens economic resilience, supports innovation across local industry and creates opportunities for businesses to lift productivity, reduce waste and compete in emerging markets.

The municipality is home to strong education and training institutions that help connect residents to jobs and future industries. RMIT University in Bundoora and Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping, together with nearby La Trobe University, expand access to tertiary education and strengthen pathways into employment. These institutions add depth to the City's workforce offer and support growth in priority sectors and precincts.

First Peoples' culture and enduring connection to Country are another important strength of the City of Whittlesea. This strengthens place identity and creates opportunities for genuine partnership through First Peoples-led enterprise, cultural tourism, creative industries and procurement outcomes that deliver local and regional benefit. Places such as the Aboriginal Gathering Place can help make this connection more visible and meaningful in the life and future of the municipality.

A strong network of centres adds to this advantage. Epping functions as the municipality's primary city centre, with Mernda, Plenty Valley and University Hill as the primary town centres while the planned Cloverton City Centre will strengthen the network over time as growth continues in the north.

Whittlesea Township and neighbourhood centres also play an important role, contributing to the wider mix of places across the municipality. These centres are not only places of service and community life. They are also where jobs, local spend, housing, transport and investment come together most effectively. Where public transport connections are strong, including access to railway stations, high-quality urban amenity is critical to attract activity, support local services and enhance the long-term performance and appeal of centres.

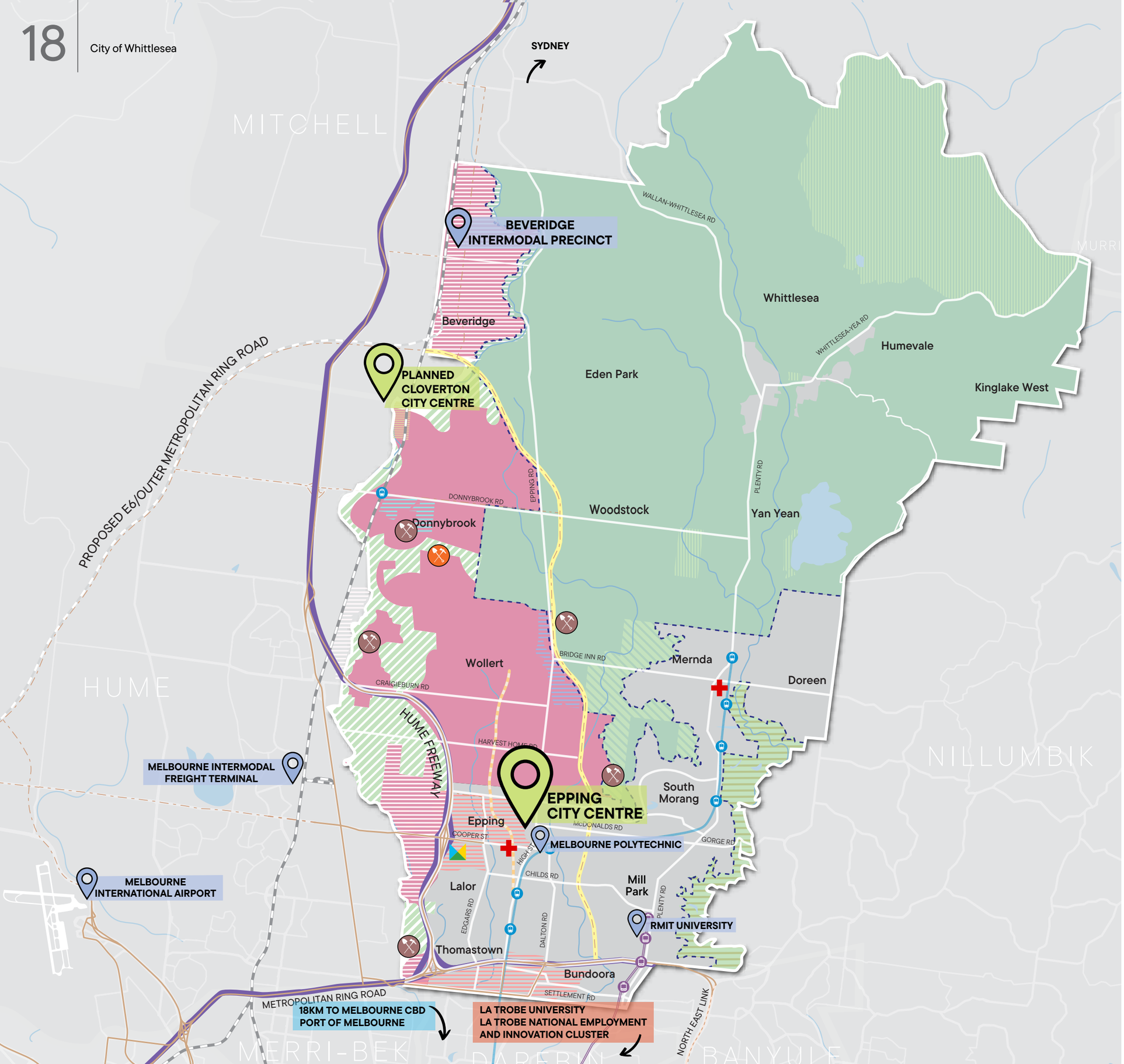
Beyond the urban area, the rural north has valued landscapes, open space and agricultural activity that broaden the City's offer. Together with distinctive food experiences, walking and cycling trails, and natural and recreational attractions, these assets add to the City's appeal. They also strengthen a "live, work, visit and invest" offer that is specific to the municipality and increasingly important as growth continues.

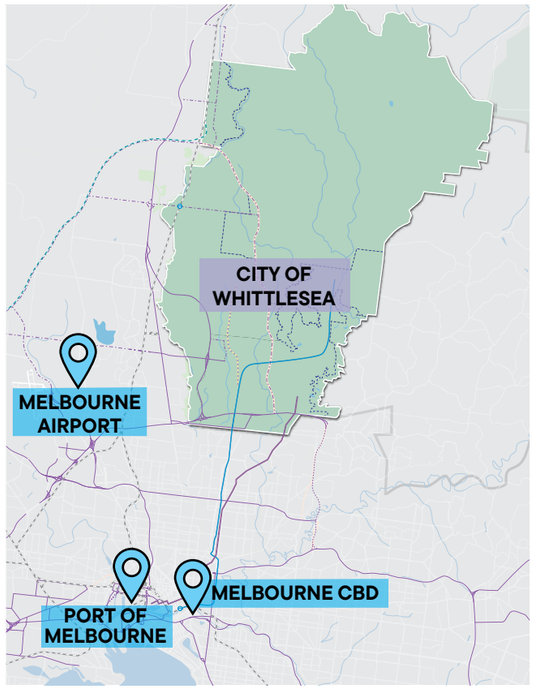
The maps on the following pages illustrate the geography of our region including key employment precincts, transport connectivity and prominent landmarks.

Melbourne Market, Epping

Why the City of Whittlesea

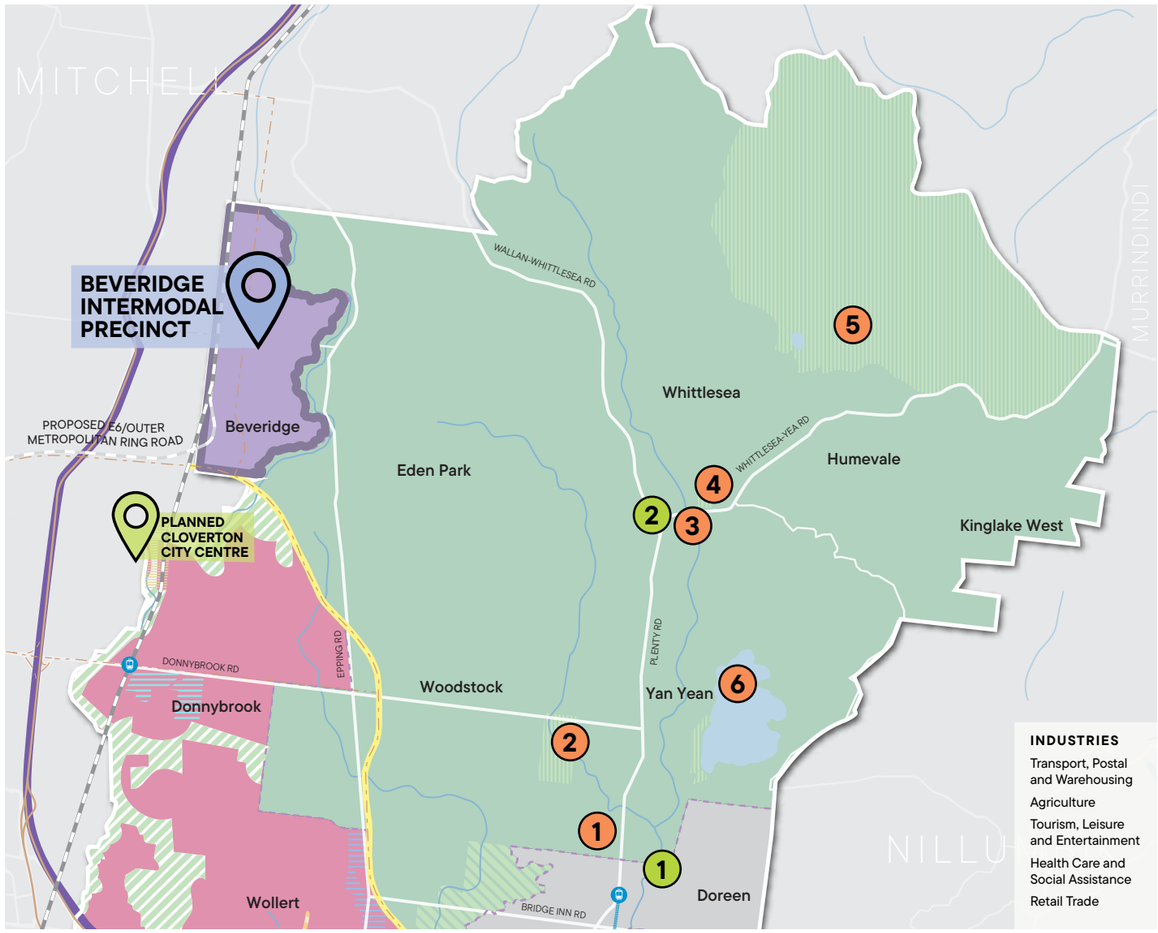
- Gateway location in Melbourne's north with access to nationwide freight networks.
- State-significant and priority economic precincts with capacity to grow and expand supply chains.
- Diverse sector base spanning logistics, manufacturing, health and services, which supports economic resilience.
- A fast-growing, diverse community that strengthens workforce and entrepreneurship.
- A network of mixed-use centres that supports local spend, services and a stronger destination offer.
- Thriving small business sector with strong entrepreneurial skills.





KEY

- Points of interest
- Mernda railway line
- Tram route 86
- Northern State-Significant Industrial Area
- Wollert Industrial Area
- Donnybrook Industrial Area
- Principal freight rail network
- Principal freight rail network - planned
- Epping-to-Wollert railway extension - proposed
- Principal freight road network
- Principal freight road network - planned
- E6 corridor - proposed
- marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parkland - proposed
- bunjil nganga Parkland Quarry Hills
- Plenty Gorge Parklands
- Parks / open spaces
- Green wedge
- Established area
- Urban growth area
- Urban growth boundary
- Mernda Community Hospital and Northern Hospital
- Melbourne Market
- Quarry - current
- Quarry - planned



NORTH

KEY

- Points of interest
- Mernda railway line
- Northern Freight Precinct
- Wollert Industrial Area
- Donnybrook Industrial Area
- Principal freight rail network
- Principal freight rail network - planned
- Epping-to-Wollert railway extension - proposed
- Principal freight road network
- Principal freight road network - planned
- E6 corridor - proposed
- marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parkland - proposed
- bunjil nganga Parkland Quarry Hills
- Mount Disappointment State Forest/ Kinglake National Park
- Green wedge
- Established area
- Urban growth area
- Urban growth boundary
- Points of interest
  1 Regional Sports Precinct
  2 Growling Frog Golf Course
  3 Whittlesea Courthouse
  4 Whittlesea Showgrounds
  5 Toorourrong Reservoir
  6 Yan Yean Reservoir
- Major retail centres
  1 Mernda Town Centre
  2 Whittlesea Township

SOUTH

KEY

- Points of interest
- Mernda railway line
- Tram route 86
- Epping City Centre
- Cooper Street Employment Area
- Cooper Street Waste and Recovery Hub
- Epping Health Precinct
- Thomastown Industrial Precinct
- University Hill Bundoora
- Plenty Valley Town Centre
- Donnybrook Industrial Area
- Principal freight rail network
- Epping-to-Wollert railway extension - proposed
- Principal freight road network
- Principal freight road network - planned
- E6 corridor - proposed
- marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parkland - proposed
- bunjil nganga Parkland Quarry Hills
- Plenty Gorge Parklands
- Established area
- Urban growth area
- Urban growth boundary
- Points of interest
  1 Melbourne Market
  2 Northern Hospital
  3 Mernda Community Hospital
  4 Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum and Heritage Gardens
  5 Darebin Creek Parklands
- Education
  1 Melbourne Polytechnic
  2 RMIT University
- Major retail centres
  1 Pacific Epping Shopping Centre
  2 University Hill Town Centre and DFO
  3 Westfield Plenty Valley Shopping Centre

A decade of opportunity

The City of Whittlesea has a unique combination of scale, growth momentum and job-anchoring precincts. The next 10 years create an opportunity to convert those advantages into a stronger employment base, broader participation and greater investment confidence. Building on this foundation, we have identified 10 opportunities for growth to deliver stronger economic outcomes for the community and lasting competitive advantage for the City of Whittlesea.

Epping City Centre

City of Whittlesea Business Network

1. State-significant and job-rich precincts that attract the right industries and strengthen clusters

The City of Whittlesea can strengthen its competitiveness by building stronger industry clusters in state-significant and job-rich precincts. It can also support city and town centres that provide local employment, services, business activity and entertainment.

Key locations include Epping's health and knowledge cluster, Cooper Street Employment Area, Thomastown Industrial Area, University Hill, and Mernda and Plenty Valley town centres. Freight-linked opportunities around the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and the Northern Freight Precinct also provide strong platforms for growth.

Together, these areas can support growth in health and knowledge services, manufacturing, construction, transport and logistics, retail, professional services and local enterprise.

To realise this potential, each precinct needs a clear role and the right supporting conditions. This includes digital capability, infrastructure, utilities and stronger supply chain connections. Together, these can help guide the right industries to the right locations, attract complementary businesses and support higher-value activity. Over time, this can increase access to jobs closer to where people live.

2. High-quality sustainable development that builds investor confidence

Confidence grows when development expectations are clear, and guidance is available early. This is especially important in Epping City Centre to employment land in the south, the state-significant Northern Freight Precinct, and growth areas such as Wollert and Donnybrook, where timing and coordination are critical. The Business-Friendly Council approach, adopted by the City of Whittlesea, can help create a clearer approval pathway for applicants and investors. Coordination with service authorities can support this work by helping deliver attractive, sustainable places.

3. Strategic precincts that bring forward industry growth and employment

The City of Whittlesea can attract investment and grow local jobs by focusing on priority precincts with the scale, strategic importance and capacity to support growth. As one of Melbourne's fastest-growing municipalities, it can align land use planning, infrastructure, services and investment to deliver more jobs closer to home. The City's key employment precincts and freight-linked opportunities around the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct provide strong foundations for growth. Clear planning, strong amenity and access to skills, infrastructure and services can increase investor confidence. Aligning local priorities with state and federal government directions can strengthen coordination and advocacy, helping secure the infrastructure, regulatory settings and other conditions needed to unlock investment and industry growth while delivering community benefit.

4. Enabling infrastructure and stronger connections that unlock growth

Growth is strongest when transport, utilities, energy and digital infrastructure are in place to support investment. Across the City of Whittlesea and Melbourne's north, major projects and proposed connections can improve access to jobs, education, health services and employment precincts. These include the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road/E6 corridor, Epping-to-Wollert rail extension, improved bus services in growth areas and the extension of Tram Route 86 to Plenty Valley Town Centre. These connections are particularly important for growing communities in Epping North, Wollert, Mernda and Doreen, and established employment areas in Epping, Thomastown, Bundoora and South Morang. Many of these projects depend on state government investment, planning and delivery, alongside engagement with developers and infrastructure providers to bring forward enabling infrastructure. A regional approach across Melbourne's north can help align priorities, strengthen advocacy and support timely infrastructure delivery that unlocks growth, improves freight movement and connects more residents to jobs and services closer to home.

5. Clearer positioning that strengthens attraction and advocacy

A clear investment story for the City of Whittlesea can make the City's offer easier to understand and act on. Consistent messages across partners can improve conversion from enquiry to investment, strengthen advocacy for priority precincts and enabling infrastructure, and position the City to respond to state and federal government priorities, programs and funding opportunities. This is especially important for positioning the City's northern freight and logistics role, Epping's health and knowledge cluster, and established industrial activity in the south, such as advanced manufacturing and food and beverage. A clear profile for each precinct and the sectors it is best placed to support can help explain what each location is suited to, why it matters and what it can accommodate. Keeping this story current can strengthen confidence, support advocacy and help align effort over time.

6. Vibrant centres and creative enterprise that lift local spend

Vibrant centres can increase visitation, dwell time and local spend, while strengthening participation and pride in place. Established and emerging regional centres and precincts such as Epping, University Hill and Mernda Town Centre, and neighbourhood centres such as the Lalor shopping precinct and Laurimar and Aurora town centres, play an important role in supporting daily life, local business needs and community connection. The City of Whittlesea's growing creative community can add energy, visibility and local value by showcasing work, testing ideas and earning locally.

Pop-ups, markets, exhibitions, performances, co-working and streetscape improvements can activate places people already use and strengthen centre performance. Targeted activation in well-connected locations can support stronger evening trade and a more consistent night-time economy. High-quality built-form and design for ease of access, safety, amenity, cultural safety and public realm can build confidence and support longer-term investment.

7. Skills connected to jobs and clear career pathways

Employment pathways are strongest when training aligns to current and future demand and connects to where jobs cluster. Partnerships between industry, training providers, employment services and community organisations can create clearer routes into volunteering, work placements, apprenticeships and employment, helping young people and jobseekers build experience and transition into work. RMIT University and Melbourne Polytechnic, and nearby La Trobe University, can help connect learning to jobs and future industries in priority precincts. This includes opportunities in Epping's health and knowledge precinct, the City's manufacturing, logistics and freight-linked employment areas, and the broader metropolitan labour market.

8. Growing local enterprise through small business and entrepreneurship

Small business and entrepreneurship underpin the City of Whittlesea's day-to-day economy across centres, industrial areas and neighbourhoods. With many businesses micro and small, practical support to improve skills, systems and performance can boost resilience, productivity and growth over time.

The Business Concierge helps new and existing businesses navigate requirements and connect to the right guidance earlier. Grants, stronger core systems and safe adoption of digital tools and emerging AI can help local businesses modernise, compete, innovate and employ.

9. Shared prosperity through inclusive pathways into work and enterprise

Inclusive pathways grow workforce participation and local enterprise by connecting more people and businesses to opportunity. The City's diversity is a strength, bringing skills, experience and networks that can support local employment and supplier success. Better recognition of overseas qualifications, volunteering opportunities and tailored employment pathways can help more people build local experience, confidence and connections to move into work sooner.

Social procurement, Work Integrated Social Enterprises and strong partnerships can open new entry points into employment and entrepreneurship. Building local supplier capability, particularly among micro and small businesses, can help more businesses access procurement and supply chain opportunities, keep more spending local and strengthen the local economy.

10. Sustainable business growth that drives long-term advantage

Resource recovery and sustainable practices, including activity linked to the City of Whittlesea's Resource Recovery Hub and decarbonsation practices, provide a growing pathway to strengthen the local economy through innovation, investment and more sustainable business activity.

As new industries emerge, their growth can be shaped to support sustainability, resilience and long-term value.

Local businesses can build resilience, lift productivity, reduce waste and adapt to new technologies and markets. Together, these shifts can attract investment, strengthen supply chains and position the City as a leader in practical, business-focused sustainability.

Floridia Cheese, Thomastown

Strategically unlocking our growth advantage

The City of Whittlesea is growing fast. Over the next decade, Council will focus on enabling investment-ready precincts, stronger businesses, local jobs, and broader participation so prosperity is shared.

As part of Melbourne's north, the City's economic future is shaped by connections to metropolitan labour markets, freight and logistics networks and the wider knowledge economy. What matters most is how well skills, infrastructure, place and investment confidence are aligned and delivered in the right sequence.

This Strategy focuses on four key directions that Council can lead and influence through partnership, advocacy, planning and facilitation. Delivery will be set out in two-year Economic Growth Action Plans.

At a glance: Four key directions

Business growth and innovation
Easier navigation, stronger networks and productivity uplift

Investment and infrastructure for industry growth
Precincts ready for investment, clearer pathways for investors and servicing certainty

Skills and knowledge for the future
Pathways, placements and future-ready skills linked to jobs

Vibrant and inclusive economy
High-quality centre activation, stronger night-time activity and broader participation

Beveridge Intermodal Precinct

Key direction 1:

Business growth and innovation

"It would be great to see more local social enterprise opportunities for young people across a diverse range of areas, as well as small business training skills." – Business quote, focus group consultation, November 2025

What it unlocks

A stronger local economy depends on businesses that can start, adapt and scale. With a large base of micro and small businesses, improving productivity and capability is one of the highest-impact ways to grow local jobs over time. This requires clear navigation, strong networks, practical support for entrepreneurship, and safe adoption of digital and emerging tools.

What we want to achieve

Council will focus on practical, high-value support that improves business performance:

- making it easier to do business through a Business-Friendly Council approach that improves clarity, certainty and consistency across Council processes and requirements
- providing Business Concierge support that helps new businesses start and enables all businesses to access the right guidance earlier
- strengthening business networks and precinct connections
- delivering targeted support to improve skills, systems and performance, including productivity, digital adoption and practical, safe use of new technologies
- expanding enterprise and supplier pathways.

What we will do

Our priorities	City of Whittlesea role
Make the City of Whittlesea one of Melbourne's easiest places to start and do business by improving clarity, certainty and navigation across business-facing Council processes	Deliverer/provider/partner Regulator/statutory authority/monitor
Lift enterprise productivity at scale through targeted support to improve skills, systems and performance that strengthens competitiveness and resilience	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner
Grow a stronger local supplier economy by expanding local supplier capability and social procurement pathways that keep more spending and value in the municipality	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner
Strengthen business networks and precinct connections that enable collaboration, supply chains and shared problem solving	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner
Expand pathways into entrepreneurship and enterprise for priority cohorts through joined-up partnerships and clearer referral pathways	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner

Metro Signs, Epping

What success will look like

Our businesses are positioned to adapt to changing environments

Our businesses are supported and connected to thrive

Facts

Local businesses: 23,735

Local jobs: 87,120

Jobs growth: +13,678 local jobs from 2020–2021 to 2024–2025, including 4,619 in health, 2,659 in education, 2,443 in construction and 1,018 in wholesale trade

What we've done so far

Delivered ongoing business engagement through the City of Whittlesea Business Network and Business Advisory Panel, strengthening local connections and collaboration opportunities.

Delivered the annual City of Whittlesea Business Awards to recognise local business excellence and raise the profile of local businesses.

Implemented a Business Concierge service to help businesses navigate Council processes and access the right support more easily.

Key direction 2:

Investment and infrastructure for industry growth

"The current situation is positive, especially since the City of Whittlesea is in its infancy when you look at some of the other traditional business districts... the good thing is there's a real opportunity for the City to dictate what direction it wants to go in." – Business quote, focus group consultation, September 2025

What it unlocks

Investment and enabling infrastructure are the foundations for more jobs close to home. As the City grows, there is opportunity to broaden the employment mix, strengthen supply chains and increase investor confidence through clearer pathways, coordinated delivery and greater certainty about servicing and access.

Stronger connectivity and better options for travelling to work are especially important, because they shape both precinct competitiveness and access to jobs. Without them, growth is harder to convert into employment, business investment and stronger long-term value.

Investment and infrastructure support Victorian and Australian Government priorities by enabling business investment, employment growth and productivity through improved infrastructure, investment attraction and precinct development. By advocating for strategic transport and freight connections, strengthening employment precincts and creating conditions for industry expansion, Council can help deliver shared government objectives around economic growth, advanced manufacturing, supply chain resilience, growth-area planning and more jobs closer to where people live.

What we want to achieve

Council will prioritise investment readiness in locations with scale, anchors and momentum, including Epping City Centre, Cooper Street Employment Area, Thomastown Industrial Precinct and freight-linked opportunities in the north such as the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and the Northern Freight Precinct.

Council will focus on:

- what investors need most to commit, including transport connections, infrastructure and utilities, clearer approval pathways, and access to a skilled workforce
- advocating for transport connections and options for travelling to work, especially where poor connectivity is limiting investment, access to jobs and precinct performance
- aligning local precinct and infrastructure priorities with state and federal government directions to strengthen advocacy, coordination and investment readiness
- proactive engagement with priority sectors and the development industry, while setting a clearer role for each precinct and strengthening the conditions that attract sustainable investment, jobs and long-term value
- supporting investment and industry growth, including emerging industries, in ways that strengthen sustainability, resilience, long-term value and precinct competitiveness.

What success will look like

Our City is recognised as a strategic destination for investment

Our City is a growing contributor to the Victorian economy

What we will do

Our priorities	City of Whittlesea role
Position priority precincts for investment by strengthening clusters, setting clear plans, creating the right planning conditions, and securing anchor opportunities that help bring investment forward.	Deliverer/provider/partner Advocate Regulator/statutory authority/monitor Planner
Strengthen investor confidence through clearer approval and development pathways, earlier guidance, and proactive facilitation for priority projects	Planner Facilitator Regulator/statutory authority/monitor
Curate attractive, high quality and sustainable development with high quality amenity in priority locations by setting clear expectations for development and investment in public realm, that generate jobs and long-term value.	Planner Facilitator Regulator/statutory authority/monitor
Improve connectivity to jobs and precincts through sustained advocacy and partnership to bring forward the transport and enabling infrastructure needed to support growth and access to work	Advocate Deliverer/provider/partner
Champion the City of Whittlesea's investment narrative describing clear roles for precincts and consistent messages that strengthen advocacy and local benefit	Advocate Deliverer/provider/partner

Thomastown Train Station

Facts

62% of residents drive to work while only 4% use public transport (2021)[4]

Gross regional product: $13.02 billion, representing 2.1% of Victoria's gross state product[4]

$2.58 billion of non-residential building approvals between 2020-2021 and 2024-2025[11]

What we've done so far

Recognised nationally with the 2024 Economic Development Australia (EDA) National Economic Development Award for Excellence in Economic Development Marketing & Promotion for Council's investment attraction campaign.

Launched the City of Whittlesea Business Opportunities Explorer (interactive map) to help investors view planning zones, business parks, transport routes and future opportunities.

Delivered business grants and incentives to support attraction, expansion and job creation, including the Business Relocation and Growth Program and the Business to Business Grant Program.

Key direction 3:

Skills and knowledge for the future

"One of the positives with the City of Whittlesea is they have really good education organisations." – Business quote, focus group consultation, September 2025

What it unlocks

A skilled, adaptable workforce underpins long-term growth, resilience and competitiveness as industries, technologies and job roles evolve. The priority is to connect residents to opportunities through stronger pathways, placements and upskilling. It also helps employers access the skills they need, build future capability, and ensure existing skills, qualifications and overseas experience translate into work sooner.

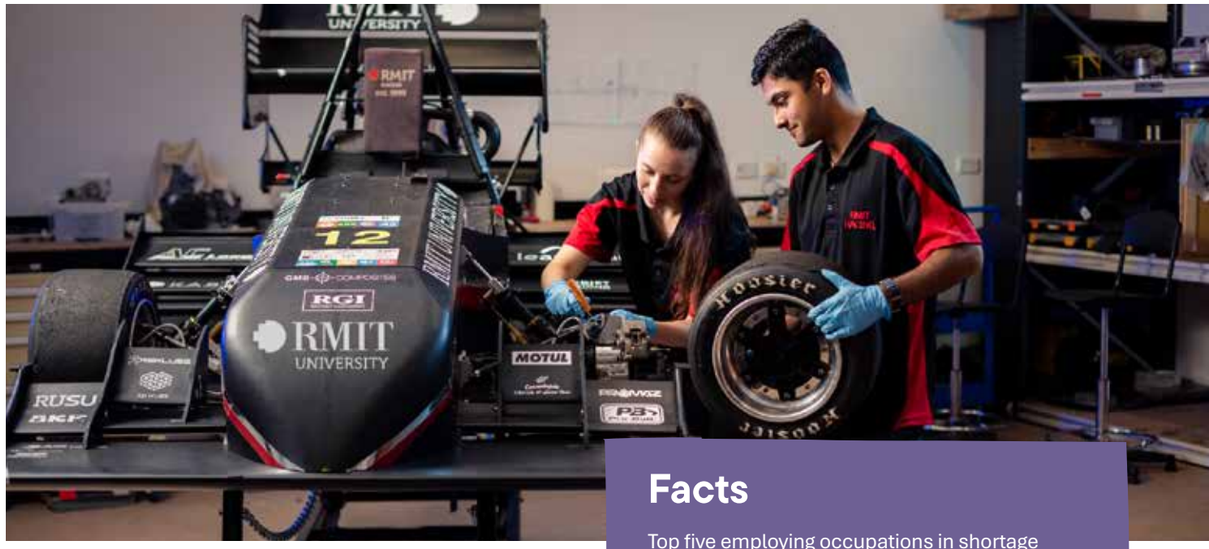
What we want to achieve

Council will focus on strengthening clear pathways into jobs by:

- aligning employers, education, training and employment services around priority occupations and growth sectors, such as logistics and freight, food and beverage, advanced manufacturing and health
- building on strong local education and training institutions and partnerships to connect learning to demand and to priority precincts
- strengthening placement, apprenticeship and traineeship pipelines into roles
- expanding upskilling options that are flexible, locally accessible and culturally safe
- accelerating time to employment by strengthening recognition of prior learning and bridging pathways into jobs.

What we will do

Our priorities	City of Whittlesea role
Build a skills pipeline that aligns training and pathways with workforce demand in priority sectors and precincts	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner
Scale placements, apprenticeships and traineeships with employers and providers, so pathways are easier to find and access	Facilitator
Strengthen digital capability and safe, practical AI literacy to support productivity and adaptability for residents and workplaces	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner
Reduce barriers to participation by expanding flexible, locally accessible upskilling and employment supports	Advocate
Strengthen recognition and bridging pathways so existing skills, especially overseas qualifications and experience, translate into work sooner	Advocate



RMIT University, Bundoora

What success will look like

Our residents have a variety of career and learning pathways

Our businesses have the skills and knowledge to remain competitive

Facts

Top five employing occupations in shortage nationally include Aged or Disabled Carers, Primary School Teachers, Secondary School Teachers, Truck Drivers and Electricians (2024)[8]

Technicians and Trades Workers employment across Australia is projected to increase by 195,800 (9.8%) over the next 10 years[9]

Employers expect 39% of workers' core skills including technical and soft skills to change by 2030[10]

What we've done so far

Partnered with Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network to deliver Whittlesea Youth Commitment initiatives, including Real Industry Job Interviews (2023–2025) with 1,000+ students participating each year.

Supported delivery of a local Job Advocate Service, providing 8,000+ residents with information, advice and referrals to skills/training and apprenticeships.

Expanded education-to-employment pathways through placement and work experience partnerships, including with La Trobe University Northern Study Hub, RMIT and Whittlesea Tech School, and delivered Careers on Wheels to support students to access work placements.

Key direction 4:

Vibrant and inclusive economy

"There's a real cultural diversity in the range of businesses that reflects the community in terms of the business operators, but also lots of businesses (serving) particular cultural communities as well."

– Business quote, focus group consultation, September 2025

What it unlocks

Vibrant centres and broader participation in community and local economic life are economic multipliers. They increase visitation, dwell time and local spend, support hospitality and retail, and build pride in place. They also create platforms for creative enterprise and community connection, helping the City's distinct culture and diversity translate into opportunity.

As the City of Whittlesea grows, city, town and neighbourhood centres will play an even stronger role in shaping how residents experience the municipality and how businesses, investors and visitors perceive it. Strong amenity, safety and ease of access will help these centres perform better, attract investment and local activity, and strengthen economic resilience over time.

What we want to achieve

Council will take a targeted, place-based approach, concentrating activation where it can most improve centre performance and perceptions of amenity and safety. Council will focus on:

- building stronger reasons to visit through events, experiences and creative showcases
- strengthening enabling conditions for night-time activity and high-quality public realm in priority locations
- connecting cultural and natural assets to local businesses through trails, itineraries and promotion
- embedding cultural safety and inclusion as part of the destination offer and the competitiveness of local businesses and experiences.

What we will do

Our priorities	City of Whittlesea role
Create high-performing precincts with a clear sense of place through coordinated activation, stronger amenity and a compelling local offer	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner
Build a safer, more confident night-time economy in priority locations by improving the conditions and public realm that enable after-hours activity	Deliverer/provider/partner
Strengthen the City of Whittlesea's destination experience by connecting visitors and residents to culture, nature, food and events through trails, itineraries and promotion	Deliverer/provider/partner
Enable business-led activation and creative enterprise by making spaces easier to use and creating more paid opportunities for local creatives and makers	Facilitator
Embed cultural safety and inclusion as a competitive advantage through practical standards, resources and support to build capability across businesses and experiences	Facilitator Deliverer/provider/partner

Aurora After Dark, Epping

What success will look like

Our businesses meet the needs of our local community and visitors, strengthening our City as a destination

Our residents actively participate in our economy

Facts

Tourism economy output: $1.29 billion and supports approximately 6,533 jobs (7.7% of total employment) (2023–2024)[2]

40% of residents were born overseas and 47% speak a language other than English at home (2021)[4]

Night-time spend in the City of Whittlesea: $560 million (FY2024–2025)[6]

What we've done so far

Launched an enhanced Explore Whittlesea platform with new arts, culture, recreation and interactive mapping features to promote activities, events and local experiences.

Strengthened regional destination promotion through collaboration, including joint promotion with Hume City Council in the Official Visitor Guide.

Delivered tailored cultural programming at PRACC and Ziebell's Farmhouse, and delivered/expanded events and festivals including the Community Festival, Walking Thomastown, Carols by Candlelight and Bundoora Beats.

University Hill parklands and residential area, Bundoora

Freeza, Westfield Plenty Valley, Mill Park

Delivering our strategy

Council will deliver this Strategy through rolling two-year Economic Growth Action Plans commencing in 2026. Each Action Plan will identify initiatives Council will lead or support, delivery timeframes, key partners and measures used to track progress and outcomes.

Additional information on Council's role in supporting economic outcomes, including the functions Council performs, is provided in Appendix A.

Council will review the Strategy in 2031 to ensure it remains aligned to community needs, changing economic conditions and Council's broader planning framework.

How Council will prioritise

When preparing each Action Plan, Council will prioritise initiatives that provide the highest combined value across:

- expected economic impact and community benefit
- deliverability – readiness, approvals and timeframes
- resourcing – cost, capacity and funding opportunities
- risk, including delivery and external market factors.

Managing competing priorities

Where initiatives compete for resources or rely on external prerequisites, Council will manage delivery by:

- sequencing actions to progress initiatives with strong readiness and measurable impact
- staging or rescoping initiatives where delivery is subject to approvals, partner readiness or available resources
- seeking partnerships, grants and co-investment to accelerate delivery.

Changes to priorities will be documented through Action Plan updates and reported through Council's established reporting processes to support transparency and accountability.

A review of outcomes and key initiatives delivered under the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022–2026 is included at Appendix B.

Equity and inclusion

A gender impact and intersectional equity lens has informed the development of the Strategy. In preparing each Action Plan, we will consider opportunities to support equity and inclusion by helping reduce barriers to economic participation, including key gendered inequities and intersecting disadvantage.

Measuring our success

Council will monitor performance and report progress through the two-year Economic Growth Action Plans, supported by a clear evaluation framework and outcome indicators.

Reporting will track both activity (what was delivered) and outcomes (what changed), drawing on available datasets and partner insights. Council will continue to refine indicators over time and work with government and delivery partners to strengthen data access and consistency. Findings will inform future Action Plans and the 2031 Strategy review, supporting continuous improvement and accountability.

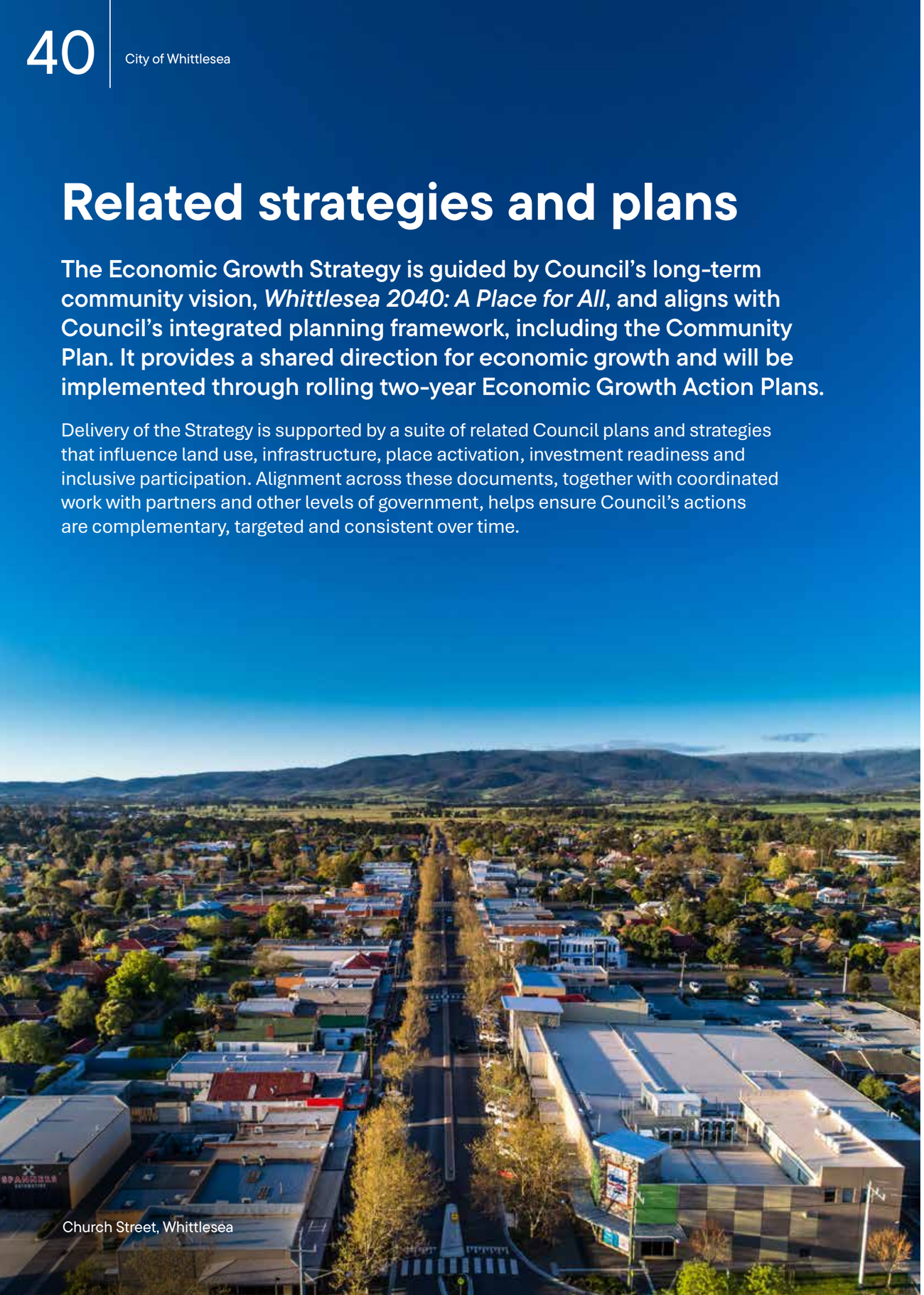
Ormond Boulevard
University Hill, Bundoora

Key direction	Community outcome	Outcome indicator
Business growth and innovation	Our businesses are positioned to adapt to changing environments	Increased local businesses
	Our businesses are supported and connected to thrive	Increased local jobs Increased employing businesses Increased Business Network participation
Investment and infrastructure for industry growth	Our City is recognised as a strategic destination for investment	Increased value of development
	Our City is a growing contributor to the Victorian economy	Increased contribution to the Victorian economy
Skills and knowledge for the future	Our residents have a variety of career and learning pathways	Increased employed residents Improved collaboration between education and industry
	Our businesses have the skills and knowledge to remain competitive	Improved knowledge and skills of businesses
Vibrant and inclusive economy	Our businesses meet the needs of our local community and visitors, strengthening our City as a destination	Improved visitor attraction Increased local spend of residents
	Our residents actively participate in our economy	Improved resident participation in our local economy Improved socio-cultural safety and ease of access in local businesses

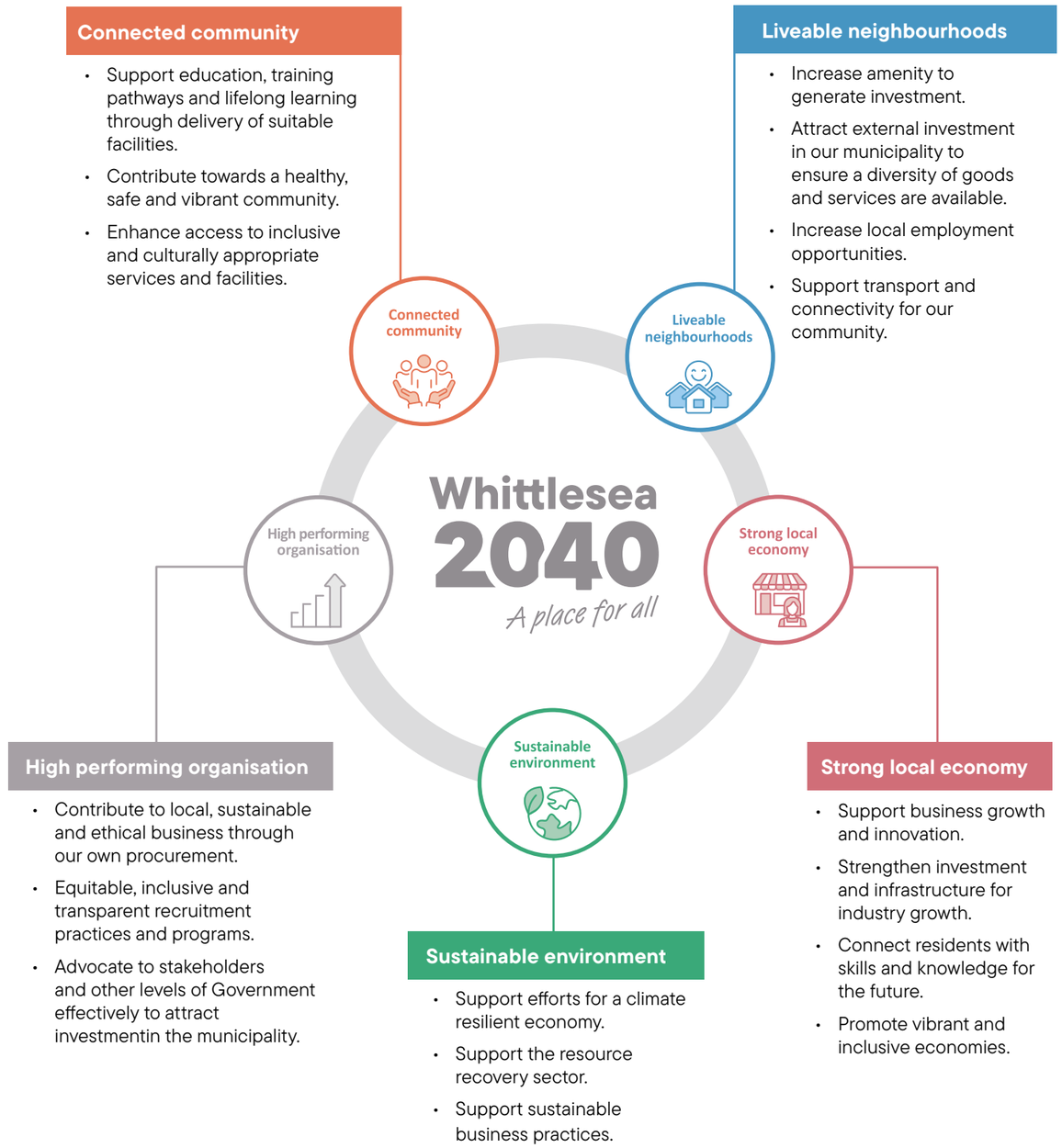
Related strategies and plans

The Economic Growth Strategy is guided by Council's long-term community vision, *Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All*, and aligns with Council's integrated planning framework, including the Community Plan. It provides a shared direction for economic growth and will be implemented through rolling two-year Economic Growth Action Plans.

Delivery of the Strategy is supported by a suite of related Council plans and strategies that influence land use, infrastructure, place activation, investment readiness and inclusive participation. Alignment across these documents, together with coordinated work with partners and other levels of government, helps ensure Council's actions are complementary, targeted and consistent over time.



Church Street, Whittlesea



Conclusion

The City of Whittlesea is stepping into a defining decade. Scale, momentum and diversity are creating the conditions for a stronger and more resilient local economy, with more opportunity closer to home.

This Strategy sets a clear and ambitious direction to lift productivity, expand job choice, strengthen local business performance, and shape places that attract investment and build confidence.

At its core, the Strategy builds on what makes the City of Whittlesea distinctive: a strategic location in Melbourne's north, state-significant assets and job-rich precincts, and a community shaped by enterprise, culture and global connections. It positions the City to compete, succeed and lead in the decade ahead, with skills that open pathways into jobs, sustainable development that builds confidence and long-term value, and a local economy that can adapt, innovate and grow.

Just as importantly, it commits to a City economy that is vibrant, inclusive and future-focused. By activating centres, strengthening destination appeal and expanding pathways into work and enterprise, the Strategy advances a model of growth that is both ambitious and shared. In this way, the City of Whittlesea is recognised for turning rapid growth into opportunity.

Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre, South Morang

Glossary

Activity centres	Areas that provide a focus for services, employment, housing, transport and social interaction. They range in size and intensity of use from smaller neighbourhood centres to town centres and city centres.
City centres	Higher-order centres with diverse employment options, services and housing stock, supported by good transport connections. Epping is an existing metropolitan activity centre under Plan Melbourne, and Cloverton is a planned future centre to be located adjacent to the City of Whittlesea.
Clusters	Concentrations of related businesses, services, institutions and supply chain connections in a particular location that support productivity, innovation and investment.
Economic participation	An individual's engagement in work and/or education, and their access to economic resources that results from such participation. It also extends from a sole focus on access to jobs to encompass the range of ways locals contribute to and participate in the economic life of our community. This can include employment, self-employment, career progression, enterprise development, education and training, and volunteering.
Enabling infrastructure	Facilities and transport networks (buildings, roads, and utilities) needed for the functioning of a community. Infrastructure can be provided by the private sector (local roads, childcare, shopping centres), or by government (kindergartens, schools, railways).
Enterprise	Business activity and entrepreneurship, including starting, running and growing businesses.
Entrepreneur	A person who sets up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks in the hope of profit.
Entrepreneurship	The process of identifying opportunities and starting, developing or growing a business or venture.
Growth area	Areas on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne designated for transition from rural to urban uses.
Higher value industry	Industries that generate stronger economic value through investment, job growth and deeper supply chains.
Inclusive pathways	Pathways into work and enterprise that connect more people and businesses to opportunity, including through social procurement, partnerships and better recognition of existing skills and qualifications.
Innovation	A new idea, method, or process applied in a research or business setting.
Investment readiness	The extent to which a precinct, site or project is prepared to attract and support investment.
Land use	The primary purpose for which the land is used or may be developed.
Neighbourhood centre	Sub-section of an urban area in which people spend most of their time. This is typically an area not interrupted by barriers (such as major roads or railway lines) where people can meet their most common needs (such as education, grocery shopping and recreation).
Precincts	Geographic areas with a distinct economic, employment or place function, shaped by a mix of land use, infrastructure, assets and business activity.
Priority cohorts	The five target populations who do not have equal access to employment or pathways to employment were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, including refugees and asylum seekers (and international students), people with disability, women, and young people.
Priority sectors	Industries identified as offering strong potential to support local jobs, investment, productivity and long-term competitive advantage.
Servicing certainty	Confidence that the services needed to support development or investment will be available when required.
Small to medium enterprise	A business with 0-19 employees.
Social enterprise	Social Traders, which certifies social enterprises across Australia, defines these businesses as organisations that have a defined community cause, derive a large portion of income from trade, and invest efforts and resources into its purpose so public benefit outweighs private gain.
Sustainability	A characteristic or state whereby the needs of the present population can be met without compromising the ability of future generations or populations in other locations to meet their needs.
Town centre	Suburban centres that provide access to a wide range of goods and services. They have different attributes and provide different functions, with some serving larger subregional catchments. Plan Melbourne identifies 121 major activity centres, including South Morang (Plenty Valley), Mernda and Wollert in the City of Whittlesea.

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Appendix A

Strategy development, engagement and how to use this document

This appendix outlines how the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 was developed, including engagement undertaken, how the Strategy aligns with Council's integrated planning framework, and how it will be implemented and reviewed.

Strategy development

Achieving the outcomes in this Strategy relies on Council working with the community and delivery partners including businesses, investors, Traditional Owners, education and training providers, community organisations, industry bodies and all levels of government.

Where the Strategy refers to "our approach", it reflects Council's commitment to coordinated delivery with partners to achieve the best outcomes for the City. From mid-2025 to mid-2026, the community was invited to share what matters most for the future of the City of Whittlesea's economy. More than 400 people took part online, in person and through focus groups, contributing ideas, priorities and local perspectives that have helped shape the Strategy.

How we engaged

89 surveys
completed in person

Engagement activities at community and business events

6 pop-up engagement stalls
across the municipality including Bundoora, Epping, Mernda, South Morang, Thomastown and Whittlesea township

29 community and business focus groups
held with **191** participants across community, business, industry, government and investors

99 surveys
completed online at
engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au

Workshops and meeting with key stakeholders

Multi-channel communications campaign

Other engagement and evidence

Insights from other relevant Council engagement and research were also used to strengthen alignment, including:

Whittlesea 2040 community vision community consultation

- more than 4,000 participants and through submissions, workshops, forums, and online and in-person activities

Let's Talk: Shaping the Community Plan 2025-2029

- surveys, events, pop-ups and targets focus groups

September 2025 Community Insights Study

- surveyed households across the municipality about a range of topics, including their housing, health and wellbeing, employment and community participation

Community priorities focus groups

- community members from a range of age groups, genders, abilities, cultural backgrounds, suburbs and household structures participated in a series of focus groups to shape the direction of the Economic Growth Strategy

Draft 2025-2026 Budget and Community Plan Action Plan

- pop-ups throughout the municipality and the Engage Whittlesea platform, to obtain input from the community on our future budget spend

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Mernda Skate Park

View of the Melbourne CBD from bunjil nganga Parkland Quarry Hills

Melbourne Polytechnic, Epping Campus

How we plan – an integrated approach

Council's integrated planning framework aligns long-term community direction with practical delivery through two-year Action Plans and supporting strategies. The Economic Growth Strategy is one of Council's key strategies supporting *Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All* and informing priorities in the Community Plan and two-year Action Plans.

Using this strategy

The Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 provides a 10-year framework across four key directions: skills and knowledge for the future; investment and infrastructure for industry growth; business growth and innovation; and a vibrant and inclusive economy.

From 2026, two-year Economic Growth Action Plans will translate the Strategy into specific initiatives, delivery timeframes, partners and measures. The Strategy will be reviewed in 2031 to remain responsive to changing conditions and community needs.

Appendix B

Review of the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022-2026

This appendix summarises delivery and outcomes under the Strong Local Economy Strategy 2022–2026. It provides context for the Economic Growth Strategy 2026–2036 by outlining what was delivered, what changed in key indicators, and where work is continuing.

Overview

The Strong Local Economy Strategy guided Council's economic development focus through clearer priorities, stronger partnerships and targeted activity to support investment attraction and business growth.

Over the life of the Strong Local Economy Strategy, Council prepared five supporting plans to provide deeper focus and targeted initiatives in priority areas. These plans included the AgriFood Plan, Circular Economy Plan, Destination Plan, Economic Participation Plan and Investment Attraction Plan. In parallel, Council established and advanced operational initiatives that continue to support local businesses and activity centres, including the City of Whittlesea Business Network, City of Whittlesea Business Awards, Business Concierge Service, Business to Business Grant Program and Retail Activity Centre strengthening.

Crusader Caravans, Epping

PREVIOUS PAGE: University Hill Town Centre, Bundoora

Outcomes and indicator movement

Across the Strategy period, the municipality recorded positive movement across a range of indicators. The table below summarises key shifts.

Outcome indicator	Outcome
Increase in the number of medium and large businesses	From June 2021 to June 2024[12] 20-199 employees: 35.9% increase 200 or more employees: 85.7% increase
Increase in the number of local jobs	From June 2021 to June 2024[2] 16.1% increase
Decreased unemployment rate	Down from 8.2% in June 2021 to 4.2% as at June 2025[13]
Increased investment in key commercial and industrial areas	From June 2022 to June 2024 change in GRP 'Value Added' Epping: 7.4% increase Mernda: 8.9% increase South Morang: 6.4% increase Thomastown: 5.3% increase Uni Hill: 10.0% increase
Increase value of building approvals, non-residential and residential	From June 2021 to June 2024 23.2% increase ($1.365 billion to $1.682 billion)[11]
Increased access to library facilities and services	In 2023, 42% of library users attended to study, conduct research or participate in programs, indicating the library's contribution to local learning and skills development[14]
Increased number of local qualified workers in local jobs	The jobs-to-workers ratio remained stable at 0.66 from 2021 to 2024, indicating consistency in the relationship between local jobs and resident workers during a period of population growth[2]
Increase in enrolment in higher education programs	As of 2021, 20% of the population aged 15-84 were enrolled in tertiary education[4]
Increase in small employing businesses	From June 2021 to June 2024[12] 5-19 employees: 11.4% increase 1-4 employees: 0.7% decrease
Increase local and international export as a share of gross regional product (GRP)	39.42% of headline GRP from exports in 2021 up to 41.42% in 2024[2]

[1] Note: businesses of this size may have grown and are not captured in the category above

Key initiatives delivered

Summary of major programs and partnerships delivered during the Strategy period.

Key direction 1:
Increased local employment

Supported small business mentoring for priority cohorts through targeted workshops, including delivery via the Women's Arabic group and the Women's Lunch Series in collaboration with Whittlesea Community Connections.
Annually co-hosted the Career Networking Expo at Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre (PRACC), promoting local jobs and careers, with 950+ students each year in attendance.
Delivered business grants and incentives that supported business expansion, innovation and local job creation, including the Business Relocation and Growth Program and the Business to Business Grant Program (supporting business improvement initiatives and capability development).
Delivered a jobs and training event to support women into work (Epping Galada Women's Job and Training Event with Lendlease), with 60+ residents attending, 30 job opportunities, and 19 exhibitors (employers and training/ career providers).
Delivered the "It's All Here" local spend campaign to encourage residents, visitors and businesses to buy local, generating more than $800,000 in local economic activity and strengthening awareness of the value of shopping locally.
Implemented the Investment Attraction Communications Framework, delivering an annual program of promotional and marketing activities (materials, paid advertising, direct marketing) to lift awareness of the municipality as a strategic business location.
Developed print and digital itineraries for walking and cycling, linking public transport and popular sites to improve the visitor "product" and encourage longer stays.
Reviewed and updated the Priority Development Assessment Process (PDAP) to improve clarity, accessibility and alignment with economic development priorities, supported by updated collateral and engagement with the development and business community.
Increased the City of Whittlesea's visibility as an event-ready destination through sponsorship and presence at major events (such as the That's Amore Ricotta Festival, Whittlesea Agricultural Show, Whittlesea Country Music Festival, Community Festival via the Discovery Zone, Diwali Mela).
Implemented a Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events (MICE) Prospectus (published on the Explore Whittlesea website) to promote local function and events spaces and strengthen business events visitation.
Developed food trails and itineraries in collaboration with local producers and makers, distributed at the Community Festival and uploaded to Explore Whittlesea to support local business exposure and visitor spend.
Delivered the Inclusive Employment Program, with participants successfully completing the program, and ongoing delivery continuing through 2025-2026.

Key direction 2:
Education opportunities for all

Delivered learning workshops for new/small food businesses to build modern business capability, including artificial intelligence for small business, social media and content marketing, cashflow and budgeting for growth, and next-level growth support.
Delivered industry-focused events, workshops and engagement activities to strengthen business capability in priority sectors, including networking and skills development delivered with partners (peak bodies, education providers and industry groups).
Delivered targeted place-based training and employment initiatives in precincts, including partnering with Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) to deliver training in construction, hospitality and education, achieving 71 co-designed introductory courses and 40 employment outcomes (with 90% participants City of Whittlesea residents).
Partnered with Melbourne Polytechnic to deliver accredited, job-relevant training, including an accredited food preparation course completed by City of Whittlesea residents.
Delivered industry development programs for priority sectors, including industry-focused events, workshops and engagement activities to strengthen sector capability through partnerships with peak bodies, education providers and industry groups.

Key direction 3:
Successful, innovative local businesses

Transitioned the Shopfront Improvement Program into the Business to Business Grant Program, maintaining practical support for business improvements and capability uplift through a streamlined grant mechanism.
Continuing to implement and refine the Business-Friendly Council initiatives designed to improve how businesses interact with Council, through clearer information, more transparent processes, and user-friendly tools that provide an improved customer experience.
Produced a suite of tourism promotional videos showcasing key sites and events across nature, food and drink, and arts/culture/heritage/events to increase awareness and support visitation.
Promoted new bunjil nganga Parkland Quarry Hills trails and delivered updated walking and cycling itineraries, including the Darebin Creek Trail Story Map and video, supporting active visitation and local spend.
Supported the agri-food industry through collaboration and sector promotion, including networking events with Melbourne's North Food Group and State Government, and supply chain business mapping to encourage business-to-business connections and strengthen the local cluster.
Maintained active facilitation and advocacy for key activity centres and employment precincts, working with developers, industry and government partners to advance investment readiness and highlight opportunities across precincts (including Epping, Thomastown, South Morang, Bundoora, Mernda, Wollert and Beveridge).

Continuing work: many initiatives established during 2022–2026 are ongoing and will be built on through the Economic Growth Strategy Action Plans.

Five Vineyard, Mernda

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