

# Thomastown and Lalor Place Framework Engagement Summary

January 2023



## Introduction

Council is planning to improve Thomastown and Lalor by tailoring Council's vision 'Whittlesea 2040 a place for all' to suit the local community. To help us achieve this, a Thomastown and Lalor Framework is being developed that identifies a place responsive vision, themes, outcomes and place shaping recommendations. A draft Thomastown and Lalor Place Framework was presented to the community that aims to:

- Translate the Whittlesea 2040 vision to Thomastown and Lalor by identifying local challenges and opportunities.
- Establish a local, place responsive vision that connects to community aspirations.
- Filling the gap in strategic direction for these established areas.
- Articulating a clear Council direction for place shaping and investment priorities.
- Ensure Council planning and delivery considers the unique qualities of Thomastown and Lalor to enhance the area over time.

The Framework aims to:

- Illustrates sites and locations that have clear opportunities for improvement.
- Provides place specific guidelines to improve Thomastown and Lalor.
- Incrementally deliver the local vision over time.
- Incorporates a high-level implementation plan which identifies key partners and broad timeframes for priority place shaping recommendations.

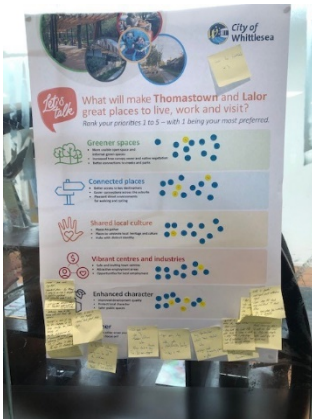
This purpose of the recent community engagement was to inform the local community of the project and its background and encourage them to share their feedback. A space was provided for them to prioritise which of the opportunities and themes are important to them. The feedback will inform future prioritisation of projects within the Thomastown and Lalor area.

## How we engaged you

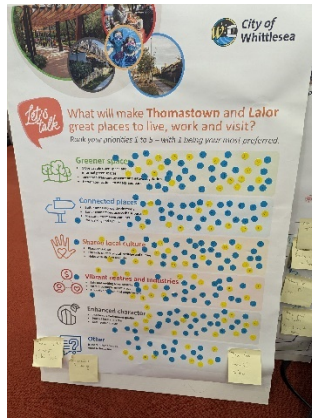
The third and last phase of the community engagement ran from 5 November to 4 December 2022. The [project engage page](#) provide the community with relevant information and provided opportunities for online engagement including survey tools.

During the engagement period, the project team held community-based in person engagement sessions at key locations across Thomastown and Lalor, including:

- Lalor Library on 7 November from 10am to 12pm.
- Lalor shops on 16 November from 10am to 12pm.
- Thomastown shops on 17 November from 2:30pm to 5pm.
- Promisetown Picnic – TRACC (Thomastown Recreation & Aquatic Centre) on 12 November from 1pm to 5pm.
- Thomastown Library on 24 November from 10am to 12pm.



*In person engagement activity.*



*In person engagement activity.*



*Thomastown Shops*



*Promisetown*



*Promisetown, rock painting*



*Lalor Shops*

*Photos: In person engagement activities*

The community engagement was promoted through a range of tactics including:

- Posters displayed in community facilities including TRACC, libraries and Community Activity Centres
- Social media posts – across Council’s channels we shared 6 posts reaching 11,591 people.
- Targeted letterbox drops – 1,000 households across Thomastown and Lalor received a letter.
- Engage Whittlesea automated email - Subscribers to the Engage Whittlesea platform were notified via email of the new project page (total 695 subscribers). Of these, 388 recipients read the email with 54 clicking through the site.
- Large corflute signage at building entries when engagement sessions were being held.

The project team directly contacted key stakeholders to encourage participation in the engagement, including:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • Thomastown Precinct Activation Group            | • Department of Environment                  |
| • Youth Advisory Committee                        | • Water Land Planning                        |
| • Business Advisory Panel                         | • Level Crossing Removal Projects            |
| • The Wurundjeri Reconciliation Group             | • Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions  |
| • Whittlesea Disability Network                   | • Heritage Victoria                          |
| • Bub Wiliam Aboriginal Child Serves (Thomastown) | • Darebin Council                            |
| • First Peoples Health (Lalor)                    | • APA Group (Australia)                      |
| • Victorian Aboriginal Health services (Epping)   | • Member for Thomastown Bronwyn Halfpenny MP |
| • Dardi Munnrow.                                  | • Local schools                              |

## Participation

A total of 367 people participated in engagement activities. The Thomastown and Lalor Draft Place Framework online engage page attracted 439 visitors during the engagement period, with 43 community members opting to follow the project page to remain abreast of developments.

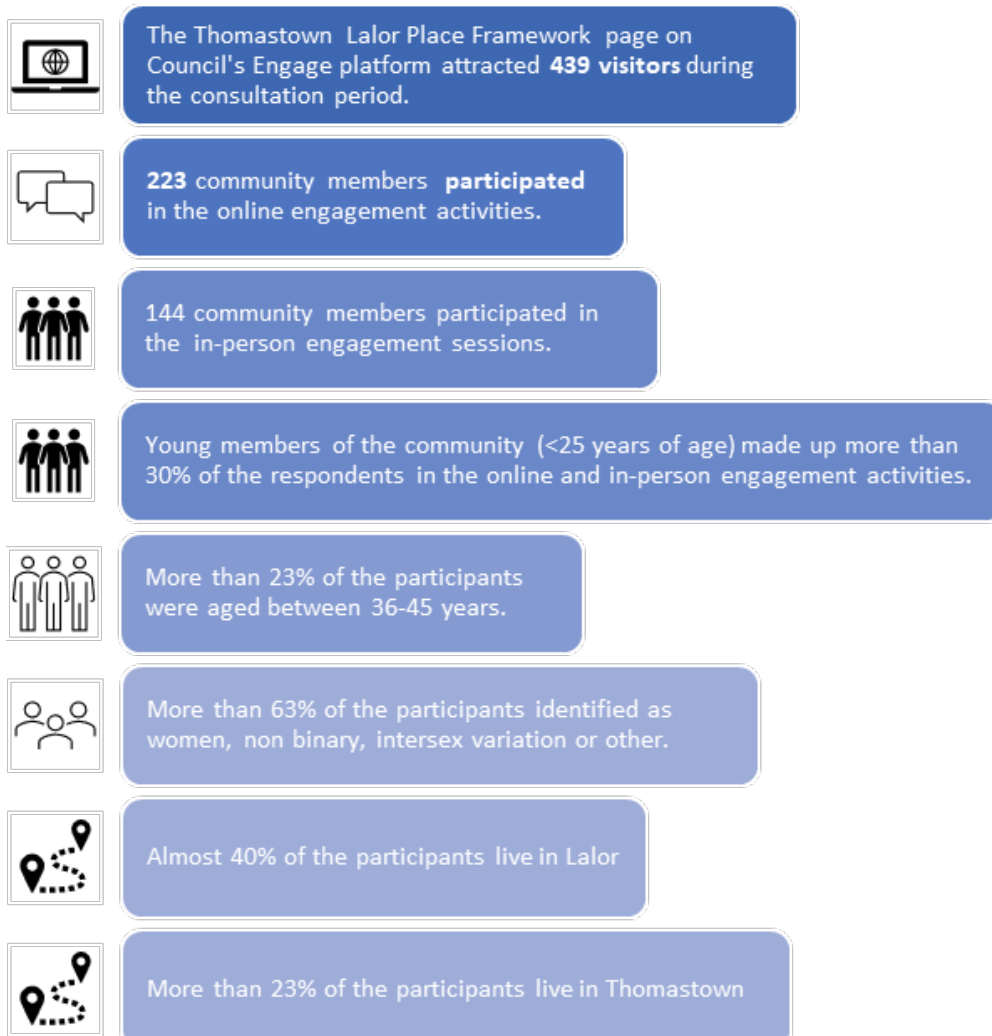
The engagement activities were culturally inclusive with bilingual staff available at events to facilitate conversation in commonly spoken languages including Greek, Macedonian, Arabic and Hindi. Council Officers attended community events and locations that encourage diversity and inclusion including:

- Promisestown Picnic – an event that encourages the LGBTQI+ community and allies of the community to participate
- Direct consultation with Macedonian Seniors Club at the Thomastown Library
- Youth Participation at the local libraries and through the Youth Advisory Committee
- Direct consultation with the mother's group that meets at Thomastown Library. This group is made up of mothers from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Of the 99 respondents to the online survey, 56.57% live in either Thomastown or Lalor. More than half (64%) of respondents indicated that they visit Thomastown and/or Lalor daily, while 25% visit weekly.

The main reasons for their visits were shopping (33%) visiting friends/family (27%) or participating in sports or recreational activities in the area (16%).

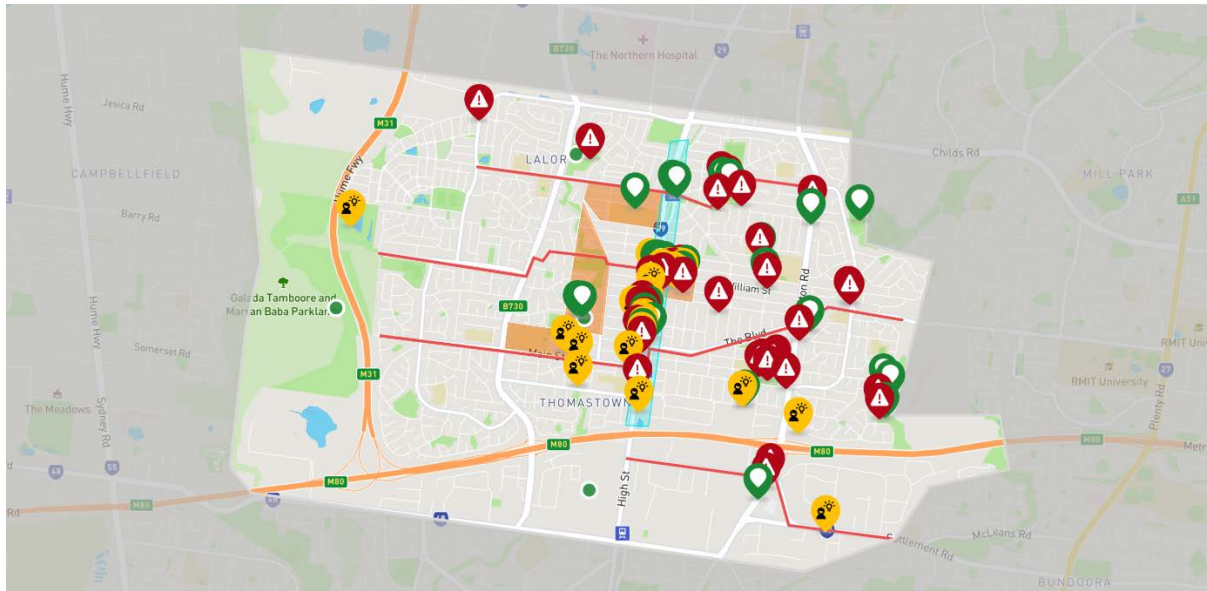
Other key participation figures can be seen in the infographic below.





## Social pinpoint map

A total of 26 respondents, who live, work or visit Thomastown and Lalor provided 92 contributions to the project interactive map. There were 29 comments on missed opportunities, 37 comments on priority sites and 25 other comments recorded on the social pinpoint map. These contributions have been captured in the opportunities and challenges section.

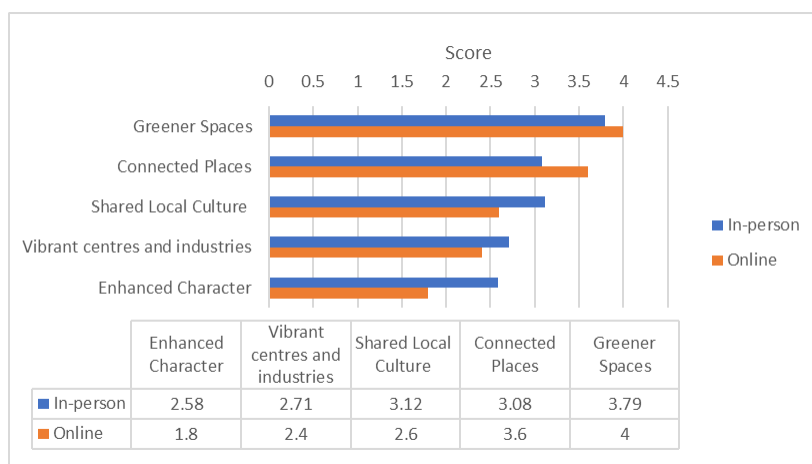


*Drop pin engagement mapping*

## What we heard

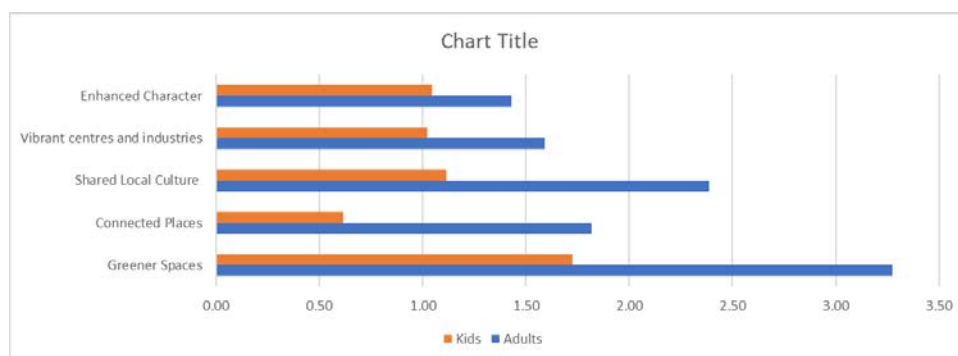
There was overwhelming support for the overall draft Thomastown and Lalor Place framework with 88% of online respondents indicating their support. When asked if they agreed with the vision included in the framework 98 out of 99 respondents indicated agreement. The sole contributor that did not agree suggested that the vision did not meet the needs of youths.

Feedback received online and in-person was generally aligned. The graphs below show the feedback received, broken down to in-person and online.



Graph 1: Online data has been converted to a scale of 1 to 4 from a scale of 1-20 from the fund it page.

Feedback related to preference prioritisation was similar among adults and children as illustrated in the below graph.



Graph 2: Children prioritisation preference is similar adults.

‘Greener Spaces’ was ranked the most important theme and Naturalise Edgars Creek as the most important opportunity overall for both the online and in-person engagement.

- Almost 70% (67%) of respondents visit Edgar’s Creek with 24% visiting the Creek daily and 43% visiting the Creek up to 12 times a year.
- While 48% of the respondents generally liked Edgars Creek, 60% see benefit in improving the Creek.

‘Connected places’ was ranked the second most important theme online and third in-person.

- ‘Accessibility and permeability across High Street’ opportunity with pleasant streets environments for walking and cycling was the highest priority on the survey.

- Almost 60% (58%) of the respondents indicated they have low to very low access to public transport and 30% of the respondents noted that they believe their perception of safety for walking and cycling was not safe.
- Kingsway Drive to Curtin Avenue was voted most suitable for pedestrians and cyclists (85%-75%). Settlement Road was identified as the most unsuitable for pedestrians and cyclists at (50%-56%), followed by Main Street to McKimmies Road (31%-49%) and Barry Road (30%-34%).

‘Shared Local Culture’ ranked the third most important theme online and second for the in-person engagement.

- Almost 50% of respondents (46%) indicated that the Main Street Precinct was within walkable distance from their home at.
- All precincts scored less than 23% when respondents were asked if there were places for youths.
- More than 90% of the respondents would like to see more community events within their precincts, and 94% of the respondents would agree to temporary road closures to support these activities.
- May Street Precinct at 71% was preferred precinct to be activated, with respondents wanting to see improve planting (43%) and improved spaces for young people (41%) within the precincts.

‘Vibrant Centres’ ranked the fourth most important theme overall.

- Almost 50% of respondents (46%) would like to have a job within walking distance of their homes.
- Almost 50% (47%) thought that Thomastown and Lalor town centres and industry areas should undergo significant strategic level change.
- Majority of the respondents said they would like more change in the town centres including increase planting and tree canopy significantly, programming of town centres with food trucks etc, improve quality of streetscapes, increase activity, increase population density, improve eateries and coffee shops opportunities, increase pocket parks and safe spaces for people to stop and linger.



*Word Cloud 1: Most places visited in Town Centres in Thomastown and Lalor by the respondents. Larger the word greater the number of respondents.*

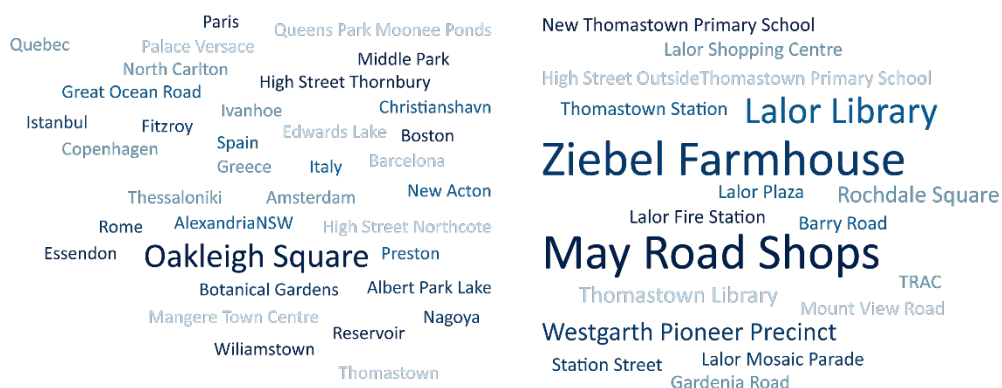
‘Enhanced Character’ was the least prioritised theme overall.

- Online survey received 45 responses which supports Activated Public Spaces overwhelmingly at 96%. More than 66% of the respondents thought that new development in Thomastown and Lalor had appropriate style and scale. Respondents had mixed comments around future development of Thomastown and Lalor in terms of massing, although all agree that the quality of the building with attractive robust materials, improved landscaping and interaction to the street is important. Refer to comments below.

*"I want more development at higher densities to be allowed. More development of commercial and residential uses will benefit our local community. I don't want any new limitations on development or "style" ... I simply want to encourage more to be built in our area. Housing is too expensive, and more homes being built is the only solution. I also want more variety of local shops and businesses accessible in walking distance of my home near Dalton Rd."* - Community Member

*"A lot of developers use low quality materials entrenching the perception of a low socio-economic neighbourhood. Also, landscape plans for new multi-unit developments should ensure low-maintenance gardens. Most landscaped areas in new units are not maintained and become overgrown weed gardens that detract from the whole streetscape. More should be done at the planning assessment stage as well as enforcing landscape plans post-development"* - Community Member

*"...no big buildings please"* - Community Member



Word Cloud 2 and 3: Favourite places. (Left = World – Right = Local). Larger the word greater the number of respondents.



## Feedback from other targeted stakeholders

The Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) prioritised the 'Connected Places' and then 'Greener Spaces' themes. They suggested improved public transport timetabling and rerouting, access, the general area to be greener and for a place to 'hangout' nearby shopping centres, upgrading trails and open spaces for recreational activities.

The Thomastown Precinct Activation Group (TPAG) were supportive and provided general comments for each theme to strengthen the existing report and the vision statement. The key points they raised are:

- '*Greener spaces*' opportunities were all supported with an emphasis to 'naturalise Edgars Creek as a Central Spine' with more vegetation to reduce heat island affect
- The '*Connected Places*' opportunities should focus on 'East-West' and 'High Street' transformations to be safer, improved public transport and to remove barriers to improve experience and universal access.
- All '*Shared Local Culture*' opportunities to be equally weighted and that they should be authentic and organic improvements, such as to their own character, programmed differently, land uses want and needs of their hubs as each of the hubs is quite different.
- the 'Vibrant Centres and Industries' priorities should be improved with programs, campaigns for businesses to take ownership of their immediate streets and neighbourhoods to improve quality, keep clean and support beautification.
- the 'Enhance Character' priorities were supported with emphasis for business to be supported to do their own initiatives e.g., support for business to go green and beautification.
- The 'Vision Statement' wording is too static and needs to go back to place. Final statement needs to unpack safety, mix of physical and cultural connections, improve history context and specific on building relationships.




APA VTS Group commented that utility infrastructure should be included within the document for future development and their guidelines to be considered for any future works. They claim any future development to the proximity of the pipeline easement should seek APA VTS input.

DEWLP - '20min neighbourhoods, Places and Precincts' team provided detailed comments around the structure of the document and implementation of actions. DEWLP emphasises adjusting wording around housing density and diversity through intensification to support 20min neighbourhoods with tangible targets. Findings of the 20minute Neighbourhoods project which is running concurrently with this project will inform these concepts.

## Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities and challenges identified through the community engagement have been grouped and sorted to find consistencies in responses. The comments generally align with the drivers of the place framework and echo the need for the identified opportunities. Comments should be attributed to any future actions.




### Greener Spaces

Focus Area	Comments
 <p>Easily accessible parks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future Edgar's Creek design needs to incorporate; paved pedestrian pathways and lighting, more picnic spaces and BBQ facilities along the creek. Naturalization and maintenance of the creek area and its facilities should be prioritized.</li> <li>• Seating and public toilets should be located at frequent intervals as it is an area frequented by families and elderly people.</li> </ul>
 <p>Responsive public spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate more outdoor activities in open spaces – especially youth-oriented activities like skateparks, netball and basketball courts.</li> <li>• Maintenance of parks and open spaces should be undertaken more frequently.</li> <li>• Reduce overgrown vegetation, littering (broken glass) and lack of adequate lighting create potentially unsafe environments for the community and encourage instances of antisocial behaviour. In particular the area around the library is seen as unsafe for holding library and community events.</li> <li>• The lack of adequate lighting, seating areas, public toilets, picnic areas and pedestrian paths along Edgar's Creek make it difficult for families and elderly people to enjoy the creek.</li> </ul>
 <p>Cooler, greener and bio-diverse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and encourage large canopy trees on nature strips, parks, and playground. The lack of large canopy trees makes it difficult for pedestrians and children to walk on the footpath or play at the park during summertime due to excessive heat.</li> <li>• Respondents mentioned that they would like to see more open spaces in Thomastown and Lalor with facilities like sports grounds, BBQs, well-maintained community gardens.</li> <li>• Employees at Lalor library highlighted the lack of open spaces around the library prevents them from organising outdoor events.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Naturalise Edgars Creek</b> opportunity was unanimously agreed upon by the community as the highest priority under the Green Spaces Theme.</p>	

*"I like areas of the city of Melbourne where there are lots of trees, lots of areas for sitting down, a wide variety of retailers and food outlets, and lots of artwork. Shade cover from trees is always a good first step" - Community Member*

Table 1: Opportunities and Challenges for Greener Spaces




## Connected places

Focus Area	Comments
 <p>High Street as a place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage safe and continuous pedestrian and cycling connections along High Street.</li> <li>• Encourage level crossing removals to improve mobility in the east-west directions.</li> <li>• More parking spaces are required at May St for retail employees.</li> <li>• More shops along both sides of High Street</li> <li>• Lack of diversity in the services provided and few options for indoor activities in the shopping precinct. Residents believe that this prevents it from being a key destination.</li> <li>• High Street to evolve into a vibrant retail centre which is accessible through active modes of transport.</li> <li>• Public transport connections through the suburbs also need be reconsidered.</li> </ul>
 <p>Enhanced connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overgrown and thick vegetation and lack of passive surveillance between Main St and Spring St, make the area potentially unsafe.</li> <li>• Reckless driving and poor lighting make it unsafe to for pedestrians at night between German Ln and Main St.</li> <li>• Public transport connects are infrequent across suburbs and to the city and surrounding destinations.</li> </ul>
 <p>Regional trails</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of safe pedestrian crossings near parks, playgrounds and childcare centres pose a threat to the safety of young people.</li> <li>• Inadequate signages for pedestrian crossings especially near parks, playgrounds and childcare centres and libraries (Lalor Library) impact the safety of children and pedestrians.</li> <li>• High Street lacks cycling connections and pedestrian crossings.</li> <li>• Lack of continuity in cycling tracks and pedestrian pathways, lighting and natural shade was another issue brought up respondents that impacted their use of pedestrian and bicycle pathways.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accessibility and permeability along High Street</b> opportunity was unanimously agreed upon by the community as the highest priority under the Connected Places Theme.</p>	

*“Oakleigh square is a great set up for an urban square idea. If you're looking for a strip look at how high street Northcote and Thornbury has evolved on High Street. There is multiple restaurant bars etc, it is perfect.”* - Community Member

Table 2: Opportunities and Challenges for Connected Spaces




## Shared Local Culture

Focus Area	Comments
 <p>Welcoming precincts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved infrastructure – seating, technological capability, lighting and Wi-Fi access create informal gathering spaces along retail strips.</li> <li>Lack of accessibility between facilities</li> <li>Improved walkability and cycling to the facilities</li> <li>Unsafe pedestrian crossings</li> <li>More information related to the precinct on display and signage along the way, e.g., historical info in Westgarth precinct. May Rd, better seating and gathering spaces with info about history of people who live in the area as well as services and signage in other languages.</li> </ul>
 <p>Culturally celebrated civic spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage festivals and allow for more fresh food and farmer's markets and informal performance arts.</li> <li>Encourage more advocacy events</li> </ul>
 <p>Informal spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate more spaces for youth to gather – indoor spaces as well as outdoor activity spaces. Outdoor activities such as skateparks, swimming, mental health services, career counselling, libraries spaces for tutoring are appreciated by young members of the community.</li> <li>Coffee and café tables and shelter through walkway - traders keep clean</li> <li>Urban edible gardens and parks and open spaces landscaped with native vegetation provide informal places for people to gather and socialize.</li> </ul>
<p><b>May Street Precinct</b> opportunity was unanimously agreed upon by the community as the highest priority under the Shared Local Culture.</p>	

*“There is very little to do in Thomastown in the evening. I would love to see a venue where local musicians could put on shows in the day and evening. Ragtime Tavern in Reservoir is a good example of this. It is used by musicians to try out their material. Has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. We have lots of musicians in Whittlesea, including from diverse language communities.” -Community Member*

Table 3: Opportunities and Challenges for Shared Local Culture

## Vibrant centres and industries

Focus Area	Comments – online and offline
 <p>Vibrant, viable and attractive town centres</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the streetscapes within town centres to include more trees, shaded walkways and street furniture. Utilise planning controls to ensure a good mix of retail, cafés and restaurants</li> <li>• Ensure shopfronts are well maintained and vacant shops are reutilised or repurposed.</li> <li>• Approximately half of the community support significant master planning closely followed by medium changes such as revitalisation as preferences</li> </ul>
 <p>Active retail spine and movement corridor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve walkability by adding safe pedestrian crossings and speed bumps to slow down traffic around town centres.</li> <li>• Encourage traders to stay open late to make the area vibrant and increase passive surveillance at night.</li> <li>• Encourage high density development near activity centres to increase availability of local jobs. It would also allow a greater number of people to access the activity centres by active modes of transport.</li> </ul>
 <p>Inclusive and dynamic local economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow for more family friendly establishments in town centres.</li> <li>• Encourage local artisanal industries that collaborate with the community through workshops or factory outlets. This would aid in bringing the community members to the industrial areas and integrate it better with the rest of Thomastown and Lalor</li> <li>• Incorporate smaller pocket parks and squares along with smaller shopping strips, within the industrial areas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reimagined Business Places</b> was unanimously agreed upon by the community as the highest priority under Vibrant Centres and Industries.</p>	




*“Family friendly nightlife, live music, art exhibitions, art and craft groups, community galleries, somewhere locals can offer their handmade items for sale.” -Community Member*

*“Happy to have major change, and major developments to grow our activity centres. The more activity the better.” -Community Member*

Table 4: Opportunities and Challenges for Vibrant Town Centres



## Enhanced character

Focus Area	Comments
 Public space interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage high density and high-rise buildings in town centres and employment areas as it makes locality feel comfortable and safe. It is more inviting and increases chances of socialisation and active living.</li><li>• Encourage use of low maintenance landscaping to prevent the area from overgrown vegetation that detract from the character of the streetscape.</li></ul>
 Urban renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid cyclone fencing as it makes the neighbourhood look unappealing and tends to collect rubbish.</li><li>• Avoid or rework street parking on narrow streets especially where there are units or compact houses as it makes the roads congested for driving.</li></ul>
 Quality and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incorporate flooding measures in newer developments as well as use materials and ground cover that lower the impact of urban heat island effect.</li><li>• Encourage good quality developments with visual appeal that fits the character of the neighbourhood.</li><li>• Avoid approving projects with cheap materials that are likely to date quickly.</li><li>• Encourage the use of recycled building materials.</li></ul>
<b>Design Excellence and Identify controls or guidelines to influence higher quality development outcomes</b> are equal opportunities that were agreed upon by the community that equally share highest priority under the Enhanced Character.	

*“Thomastown and Lalor have a working class, industrial heritage and new builds should provide a contemporary interpretation of this in design and materials used, such as in the 2020 example under your residential timeline below. It should NOT be seen as an 'interruption' but interpretation if you want to attract younger people to live and work in the area.” - Community Member*

Table 5: Opportunities and Challenges for Enhanced Character

## Next steps

Thank you to everyone that completed the survey, provided detailed feedback, dropped a pin and participated in the community engagement.

Feedback gathered from the community is being used to develop the final document and will be incorporated into the decision-making process. While we are not able to accommodate everyone's comments, the project team will provide solutions to the issues raised and balance them with the requirements of Council.

The Final Place Framework will be presented to Council for endorsement in the next few months.