

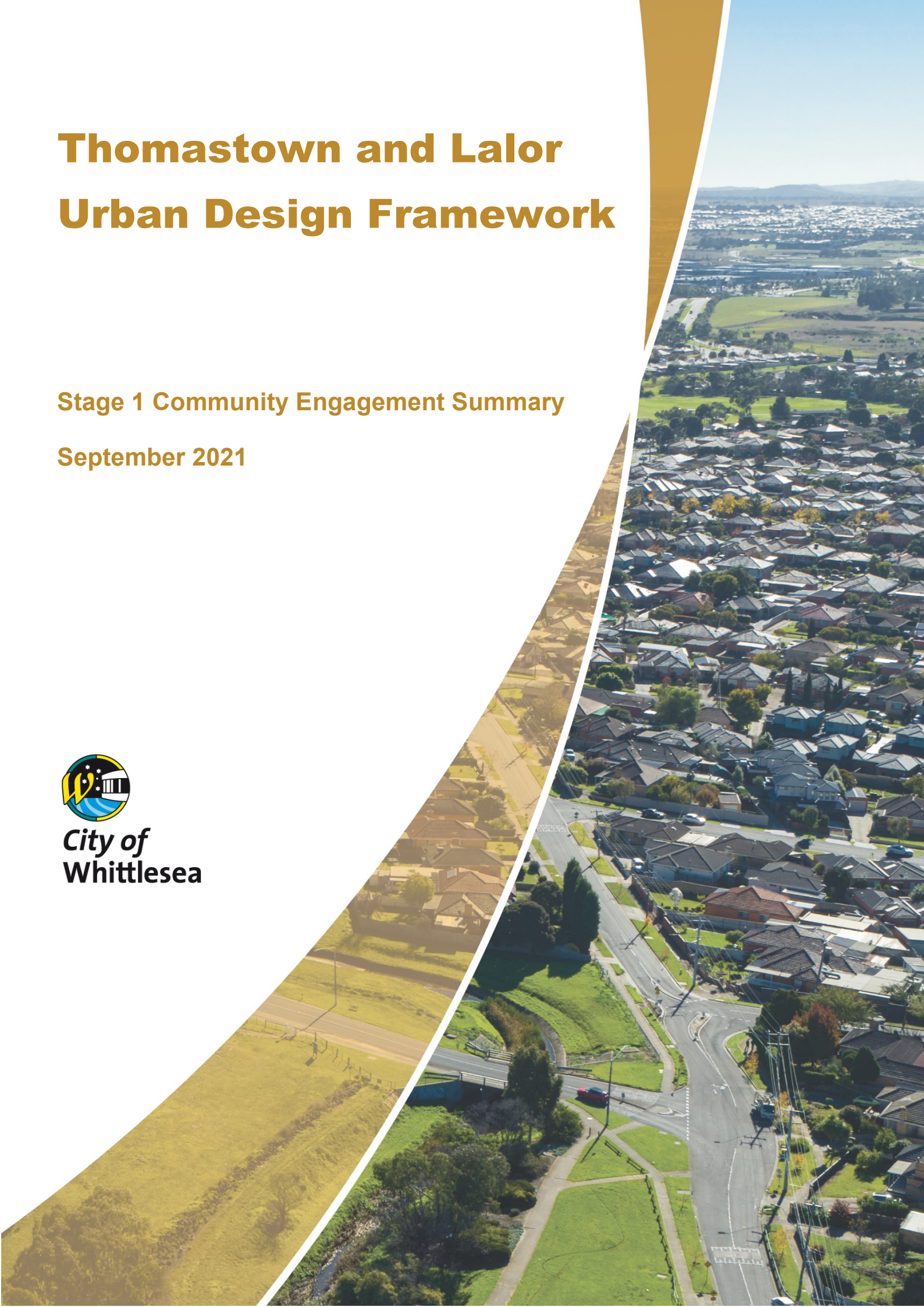
Thomastown and Lalor Urban Design Framework

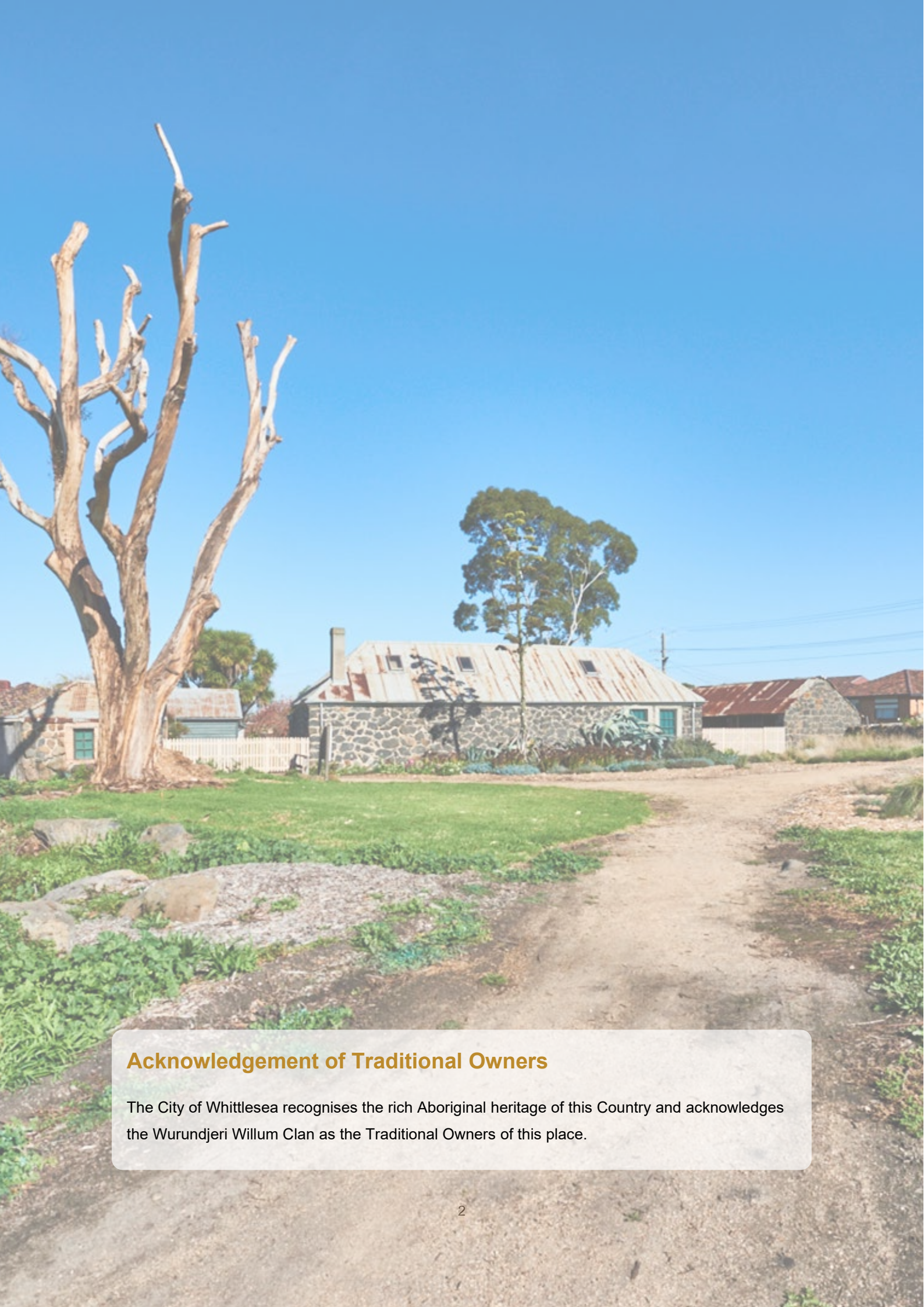
Stage 1 Community Engagement Summary

September 2021



**City of
Whittlesea**





Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage of this Country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Willum Clan as the Traditional Owners of this place.

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea is currently preparing an Urban Design Framework for the suburbs of Thomastown and Lalor. The Urban Design Framework (UDF) is being prepared to develop a vision for the area, identify and address challenges and opportunities to assist in delivering the vision.

Following the preparation of a Background Report, a Challenges and Opportunities Report was prepared to summarise the findings and to be used as a framework for community engagement.

To inform the preparation of the draft UDF, Council asked the community about the biggest challenges and opportunities in Thomastown and Lalor. From April to August, the project team met with community groups and organisations and asked for feedback. The feedback informed Council's vision for how Thomastown and Lalor will look, feel and function in the future. The results of this engagement will also inform TLUDF's broader community consultation towards the end of 2022.

At a Glance

How We Engaged

Engage Whittlesea – June to July 2021

A project page was established on the City of Whittlesea's online portal for community engagement. The Engage Whittlesea page attracted 641 visitors, 85% of these were first time visitors, suggesting that this project resonated with the target audience. Forty percent of visitors found out about the project via social media and nearly 32% were direct referrals.

The Challenges and Opportunities report was available on the site in addition to the following tools:

- Online Survey (44 responses)
A survey to capture what the community thought about the direction of the proposed principles for the TLUDF. The online survey contained:
 - Drag and drop sections, where respondents could pick top three challenges and opportunities for each place objective; and,
 - Open ended questions, where respondents could provide short written response for challenges and opportunities for each proposed principle.
- Project Q & A (23 questions received and responded to)
- Social Map (21 participants - see Appendix)
An online map that was marked up to capture locations of interest within Thomastown and Lalor, including what the community love about the area, what changes or improvements they would like to see, and what areas are important for the community and why.

Stakeholder Meetings

Six targeted sessions with local community groups and organisations in Thomastown and Lalor during 2021.

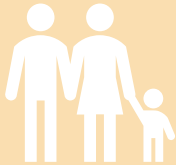
Community Event attendance

One pop-up stall held at the Walking Thomastown event in April 2021.

Who We Engaged

The online engagement captured 44 survey responses and 21 social map contributions.

The profile of online survey respondents included:

48% live in Lalor and 38% live in Thomastown.	84% were under 45 years old.	73% identified as female, 25% as male, and 2% prefer not to say.	2% identified as an Aboriginal.
48% come from couple or sole parent family (children aged 0-17 living at home), and 27% come from couple only household.	32% speak a language other than English at home.	14% household member have a permanent or long-term disability.	

Local community groups engaged include:

- TPAG (Thomastown Precinct Activation Group)¹;
- Thomastown Primary School;
- Thomastown Library;
- Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre;
- Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation; and,
- Lalor community groups².


No demographic details of social map and Walking Thomastown event contributors were collected.

¹ The meeting was attended by Thomastown residents and members of Thomastown Library, Ziebell's Farmhouse, Friends of Edwards Lake, Thomastown Youth Council, Thomastown Primary School, TRAC (Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre), Thomastown Neighbourhood House, and Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre.

² The meeting was attended by Lalor residents and members of Lalor Library, Lalor Scouts, Links Community Garden, and U3A (Universities of the Third Age).

What We Heard - Overview

The community loves:

Native species	community services and amenities	Multi-cultural groups and events
Bike and walking trails	Historic and rustic character	

The community considered the following proposed principles to be the top priorities:

1. Reintroducing a quality natural environment	2. Supporting the community to thrive	3. Celebrating local culture and experiences
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The community were in favour of:

More green spaces and tree canopies	Better open space connection and accessibility	Better public realm maintenance
Creek corridor revitalisation	Introduction of more native species	More community spaces and facilities
Aboriginal and multi-cultural events	Level crossing removal	Better connectivity across the suburbs, especially through active transport modes

The community were concerned about:

Safety and security in public places	Road safety	Higher density development's impacts on place character and street parking
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Feedback on Proposed Principles

Council's background research, including reviewing previous community engagement, identified six principles to address challenges and opportunities in Thomastown and Lalor.

Challenges and Opportunities Report Thomastown and Lalor Urban Design Framework

Council's research, including previous community engagement, identified principles to address challenges and opportunities in Thomastown and Lalor as shown below.



Strengthening the public space network

- Connecting the open space network
- Filling open space gaps
- Increasing perceptions of safety in public spaces



Celebrating local culture and experiences

- Recognising Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Promoting local heritage and culture
- Celebrating food as experience and connection



Enhancing movements and connectivity

- Activating the High Street corridor
- Improving east-west connectivity
- Providing active travel options



Reintroducing a quality natural environment

- Re-imagining Edgars Creek
- Increasing tree canopy coverage
- Re-establishing local vegetation and habitat corridors



Supporting the community to thrive

- Strengthening community hubs
- Enhancing town centres and supporting local businesses
- Opportunities for all ages



Managing urban renewal and character

- Housing diversity and affordability
- Retaining and valuing character
- Managing transitions between land uses

June 2021

Figure 1: The TLUDF's proposed six principles as found in the online engagement website.

The following principles are ordered from the highest to lowest order of importance, as identified by the community:

1. Reintroducing a quality natural environment
2. Supporting the community to thrive
3. Celebrating local culture and experiences
4. Strengthening the public space network
5. Enhancing movement and connectivity
6. Managing renewal to enhance place

Proposed Principle 1

Reintroducing a quality natural environment



The community love the native species in Thomastown and Lalor.

Respondents identified the following top three challenges and opportunities ordered from the highest to lowest priority.

Challenges

1. Very little pre-contact natural environment remains in Thomastown and Lalor. Small fragmented remnants have risks such as weed encroachment, human disturbance and climate change impacts.
2. The area has the lowest municipal canopy cover of less than 7% and an existing pattern of canopy tree loss through new developments.
3. Some sections of the waterways in Thomastown and Lalor have been concreted into drains which has reduced the amenity of these waterways and their connection to the natural environment.

Opportunities

1. Introduce wild areas through layered locally indigenous vegetation - canopy, shrub layer ground cover and other habitat elements such as tree hollows and logs to support native species.
2. Increase native tree planting in public spaces, including open space, streets and car parking areas to support climate change resilience.
3. Preserve and expand the remaining pre-1750 natural environment in Thomastown and Lalor, including small stands adjacent to waterways.

The findings above from our online engagement align with our other engagement activities, where respondents would like to see more green space, tree canopies, native species, and less concrete in creek corridors.

Our stakeholders gave us deeper, more diverse insights about reintroducing a quality natural environment in Thomastown and Lalor:

- Concrete drains in Edgars Creek caused habitat loss.
- The creek corridors could be used for school excursions if they were revegetated, clean, safe and inviting.

What did people say?

"Natural habitats need to be increased for local fauna and flora."

"The trees in our suburbs need to be increased as does making the suburbs greener to help with climate change and increases in temperature."

"Yabbies and frogs are the key indicator species of water health. Create the habitat for them."

"Creek corridor needs paths, revegetation, community art projects (areas to take students for creek vegetation and wildlife studies)."

"Greener suburbs attract more people, support our struggling native wildlife and provide essential places and scenery to help with reducing stress."

"We need more green spaces for health and wellbeing."

"Plant more indigenous trees/ shrubs/ grasses of the area pre-colonisation."

Proposed Principle 2

Supporting the community to thrive



The community love Thomastown and Lalor's various services and amenities, especially TRAC and the libraries.

Respondents identified the following top three challenges and opportunities ordered from the highest to lowest priority.

Challenges

1. Thomastown and Lalor has ageing infrastructure and oversubscribed community spaces and the demand for community infrastructure and social services is increasing. Existing community infrastructure may not meet the future demand of the changing population.
2. Town centres are aging and may not attract the community to visit local businesses and stay to connect with other people.
3. Thomastown and Lalor's community experiences higher than average levels of disadvantage, unemployment, youth disengagement and kindergarten non-participation.

Opportunities

1. Improve access to nature and open space to support community health benefits.
2. Improve accessibility and amenity of places to gather, including town centres, community hubs and open spaces, with events and a variety of activities to attract people to visit and stay.
3. Improve town centres to support local businesses to maximise trading opportunities and provide gathering spaces for community.

The findings above from our online engagement align with our other engagement activities, where respondents would like to see more support for community spaces, facilities and events.

Our stakeholders gave us deeper, more diverse insights about supporting the community to thrive in Thomastown and Lalor:

- There is a sense of urgency to improve public internet access in Thomastown and Lalor, where more than 30% of residents do not have access to the internet.
- Libraries are important community hubs that provide free community space and services in Thomastown and Lalor.
- Libraries could set up small hubs in parks and near the shops to better reach the community.
- Library services could be expanded to promote learning and training, health and wellbeing for intergenerational community and disadvantaged population.
- Community groups and events could partner up with local schools to use their outdoor space.

What did people say?

"Love the library & TRAC."

"Improve local community spaces. Outdoor spaces to gather are limited."

"Our biggest concern for staying long term is the amenities and schooling for our child."

"These suburbs where I live need more places to gather or exercise."

"Give libraries access to all community hubs to expand collections and codesign with the community what the community wants."

"Great things - everything is close (library, gym, hospital, train, ring road)."

"What groups are available for me? I'm not working, not a migrant, and being nearly 60 years old."

Proposed Principle 3

Celebrating local culture and experiences



The community love the multi-cultural groups and events in Thomastown and Lalor.

Respondents identified the following top three challenges and opportunities ordered from the highest to lowest priority.

Challenges

1. Heritage sites are not visually prominent from the street or other public spaces and are not visually linked.
2. There is a current under representation and celebration of Aboriginal heritage in the area.
3. There are no specific local character policy requirements to ensure character elements are interpreted in new developments.

Opportunities

1. Recognise and incorporate Aboriginal cultural heritage and social and cultural identity in partnership with Traditional Owners.
2. Identify locations for community gardens, events and cultural celebrations.
3. Support and strengthen the role of community gardens and productive streetscapes.

The findings above from our online engagement align with our other engagement activities, where respondents:

- Stressed the importance of recognising and celebrating Aboriginal and multi-cultural communities;
- Expressed the need for information signage for important heritage and Aboriginal sites; and,
- Would like to see Ziebell's Farmhouse potential as a community space further explored.

Through the social map, Ziebell's Farmhouse and Thomastown Lutheran Church were identified as heritage places the community loved and thought as important.

Our stakeholders gave us deeper, more diverse insights about celebrating local culture and experiences in Thomastown and Lalor:

- Multi-cultural and diverse communities are one of the key charms of Thomastown and Lalor.

What did people say?

"Celebrate the food and multi-cultural communities."

"Hold events for diverse cultures and Aboriginal culture."

"Improved signage for heritage sites and Aboriginal places of significance, include these in Google Maps and Google search engine."

"Having information signage at sites that have Indigenous history and European history."

"The Westgarthtown precinct is obviously under promoted and is very low key. I actually love it this way, but it's clearly got lots of potential for more. It's a fascinating and gorgeous precinct."

"Recognise and celebrate the migrant experience and influence in Thomastown and Lalor."

"There should be a strong focus on the diverse nationalities that reside in the area and the people that built what we have today."

Proposed Principle 4

Strengthening the public space network



The community love being close to various parks and creeks in Thomastown and Lalor.

Respondents identified the following top three challenges and opportunities ordered from the highest to lowest priority.

Challenges

1. Limited quality open space in Thomastown and Lalor.
2. Access to open space can be limited by a variety of barriers including roads, fenced areas and lack of paths.
3. Open space is often bordered by rear fencing from adjacent residences, reducing natural surveillance of the spaces which contributes to poor perceptions of safety.

Opportunities

1. Improve open space connections to create a distinct network of spaces that are safe, inviting and accessible to the community.
2. Seek ways to better integrate open space to support accessibility, perceptions of safety and improved character in the suburbs.
3. Use Edgars Creek, Darebin Creek and Central Creek as anchors to improve local amenity and open space access.

The findings above from our online engagement align with our other engagement activities, where respondents:

- Expressed the need for better open space amenities and maintenance;
- Reaffirmed the need for more open space provision, connection and accessibility; and,
- Expressed concern about safety and security in public place.

Through the social map, Pandora Park, HR Uren Reserve, Nick Asenzo Park and Merri Creek Trail were identified as the parks the community loved and thought as important.

Our stakeholders gave us deeper, more diverse insights about strengthening the public space network in Thomastown and Lalor:

- The community would like to see more child-safe fencing, shades and toilets in parks.
- There is a lack of gathering spaces in Thomastown and Lalor.

What did people say?

"We need more green space instead of concrete space."

"There are no off-lead dog parks in Thomastown, and one questionable one in Lalor (which has significant safety concerns). More dog friendly areas to facilitate social gathering please :)"

"Increase in public spaces is fantastic however a major challenge is the maintenance of these spaces."

"Some more seating options would be nice. Some shelter could be advantageous. Signage about where to sit and be safe. Lighting for the night or low sunlight days."

"More public spaces where gatherings/ BBQ's/ festivals/ markets can be held, and walking spaces/ playgrounds, which are safe and not adjoining back fencing of houses."

"Public spaces need to be linked with amenities and train stations like May St shops and Lalor and Thomastown Stations."

"Creek corridor feels dodgy if alone and less sitting opportunities."

Proposed Principle 5

Enhancing movements and connectivity



The community love the bike and walking trails in Thomastown and Lalor.

Respondents identified the following top three challenges and opportunities ordered from the highest to lowest priority.

Challenges

1. Traffic congestion: community cannot easily move across the suburbs due the limited number of rail crossings and delays when these crossings are closed. This effectively splits the suburbs into halves and is also reflected in the bus network provision.
2. Very few shared path links are provided through the local street network.
3. The Mernda Rail line provides access to three train stations but as it has been delivered at ground level, it also presents a physical barrier.

Opportunities

1. Improve active and sustainable transport and options around neighbourhood centres and train stations to improve health and climate mitigation outcomes.
2. Level crossing removals or improved rail crossings can facilitate improved transport connectivity for all transport modes.
3. Connect people to destinations and public transport through green transport hubs.

The findings above from our online engagement align with our other engagement activities, where respondents expressed concern about safety and security on transport nodes and corridors, and the need to improve traffic flow and connectivity across the suburbs.

Our stakeholders gave us deeper, more diverse insights about enhancing movements and connectivity in Thomastown and Lalor:

- Level crossing removals are needed to address connectivity issues caused by the rail line.

What did people say?

"Advocate to State Government for rail crossing removals along High Street."

"Look at lighting and safety issues around train stations."

"We need an off the main road bike lane from Lalor Station through Thomastown Station connecting with the bike lanes that run along the Keon Park to Reservoir train lines."

"Improve bus connections from train stations."

"We need pedestrianised streets with street furniture near shopping clusters."

"The open rail line is a continuing danger to people - so many deaths have occurred between Thomastown and Lalor and nothing has been done - safety needs to be addressed."

"Traffic banking up because of train station boom gates (High St – Settlement Road)."

Place Objective 6

Managing urban renewal and character



The community love the historical and rustic characters of Thomastown and Lalor.

Respondents identified the following top three challenges and opportunities ordered from the highest to lowest priority.

Challenges

1. Higher density developments rely mainly on existing Planning Scheme controls that may not deliver outcomes in line with local expectations.
2. Community concerns relating to the bulk of new developments, built form and site coverage have been raised.
3. The area is becoming increasingly unaffordable for existing residents due to increased housing costs and site redevelopments.

Opportunities

1. Seek ways to improve development designs to benefit community outcomes in public spaces.
2. Improved residential designs to provide passive surveillance opportunities to open space, creek corridors, transmission easements and car parks.
3. Prepare design guidelines for future development, with specific guidance for highly visible locations and/or adjacent to important public spaces.

The findings above from our online engagement align with our other engagement activities, where respondents expressed concern about higher density development's impacts on existing place character and street parking provision.

Our stakeholders gave us deeper, more diverse insights about managing urban renewal and character in Thomastown and Lalor:

- There needs to be more affordable housing in Thomastown and Lalor, where many families were priced out of the area.

What did people say?

"We need more social and affordable housing."

"I love the very cool old houses."

"Townhouses are fantastic as they offer smaller living and affordable options for home buyers, however there needs to remain a balance of old and new."

"I love the old school vibe of the town. Keep it!!"

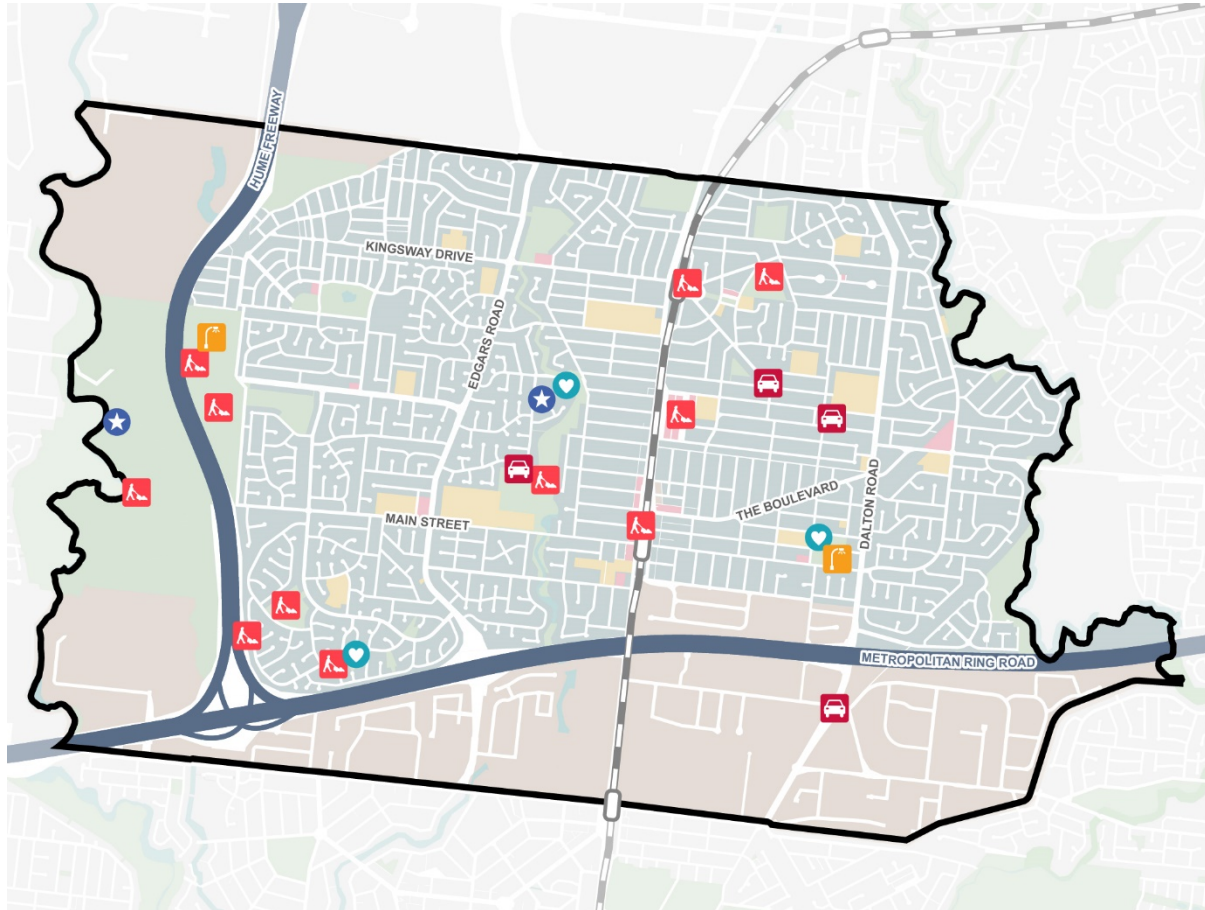
"We need to have a strategy to ensure that our suburb maintains its character which I think is centred around the lovely brick veneer houses and their lovely gardens."

"Being cautious of overdevelopment which can cause congestion on streets and lose the area's character."

"The provision of social housing is essential."

Appendix

Social Map



- Study area
- Train station and rail line
- Freeways
- Public open space and creek

- Places of interests**
- Places community loved
 - Places community thought as important.

- Places of concern**
- Concern about safety and security
 - Concern about public realm maintenance and amenities
 - Concern about traffic flow and safety



