

Community Priorities – Phase 1 Engagement Summary September 2023

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea's Community Plan 2021-2025 is Council's main medium-term strategic planning document. It expands on the long-term 20-year community vision, Whittlesea 2040: A place for all, to include key outcome priorities, services, and initiatives over the next four years. It plays a central role in Council's overall strategic planning and reporting framework.

Each year Council develops a Community Plan Action Plan (CPAP) which is an annual supplement to the Community Plan 2021-25. This action plan outlines the key actions to be completed over the next financial year to build towards achieving the Community Plan and ultimately our Whittlesea 2040 goals. These goals are for a Connected Community, Liveable Neighbourhoods, a Strong Local Economy, a Sustainable Environment, and a High-Performing Organisation.

Council consulted with people who live, work, study or visit the municipality to understand what was important to them and the areas they thought funding should be allocated to. The place-based engagement approach was designed to ensure feedback was captured from a diverse range of community members.

The feedback gathered through the engagement will be used to inform the development of the 2024-25 Budget, the Community Plan Action Plan as well as other strategies and plans including the Connected Communities Strategy and, Long-term Community Infrastructure Plan.

How we engaged you

The Phase 1 Community Priorities consultation was open for community comment from 18 July to 20 August 2023. Community feedback was sought online through Council's Engage Whittlesea platform and through direct conversation and activities at community pop-ups. The Engage Whittlesea platform utilises an accessibility add-on ensuring that it is as accessible as possible for all users. The platform also has an in-built translation tool to mitigate any language barriers to participation, allowing the page to be translated into the top ten languages spoken within the municipality

Bi-lingual staff attended targeted community-based pop-up sessions to support in person communication.

On the project's Engage page, participants were invited to participate in two activities, a survey and a fund it activity. The survey asked *what they most like about where they live, what they would like to see more of in their local area and why*. Participants were presented with the choice of 19 options listed in Appendix 1, with these themes coming from previous consultation conducted for the development of the Community Plan.

The survey also included questions related to their perception of community centres, use of outdoor spaces, transport and town centres.

Community was also given an opportunity to participate in a *fund it – Where would you spend your money?* activity. With a \$1,000 budget, participants allocated funds to projects that they are most passionate about. Some of these included support for local businesses, sustainability, education, learning and training opportunities and affordable housing.

The survey and fund it activity were designed to understand what is most important to the community in each area and where they think funding should be allocated.

In Phase 1 the project team hosted 15 community pop-ups in high foot traffic locations across the municipality. The in-person consultation activity mirrored the information being sought through the digital consultation *fund it – Where would you spend your money?* activity, with participants to place five sticky dots on their top priorities for improvement in their local area. There was also opportunity for them to add additional suggestions.

The community pop-ups were held at the following locations:

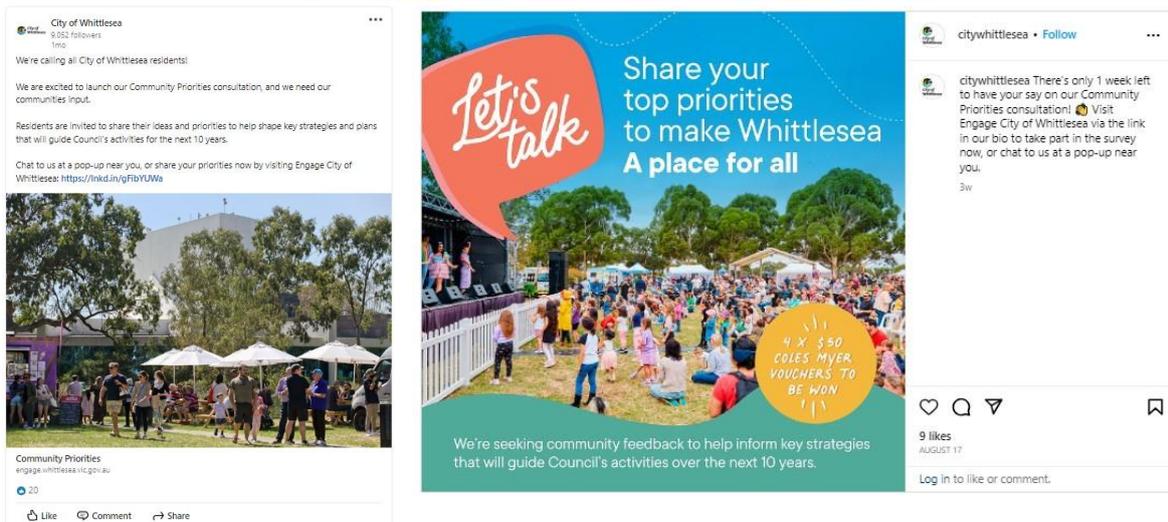
- Kirrip Community Centre in Wollert
- Epping Community Centre
- Mill Park Lakes Shopping Centre
- Lalor Library
- Thomastown Library & Thomastown Recreation Aquatic Centre
- Bundoora Square Shopping centre
- Westfield Plenty Valley
- Epping Village Shops
- Olivine in Donnybrook
- Church Street, Whittlesea
- Mernda Shopping Centre
- Laurimar Shops in Doreen
- Citizenship Ceremony at Civic Centre

Below: Community priorities pop-ups in Epping, Lalor, and Donnybrook



The opportunity to participate in the community engagement was promoted through a range of channels to have a widespread reach across the municipality including:

- Council's digital engagement platform *Engage Whittlesea*
- Social media – we shared 12 posts across Council's social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter)
- Direct email to key stakeholder groups
- Flyers and posters displayed at Council facilities and libraries.



Above: Community priorities social posts on Instagram and LinkedIn.

Participation

In Phase 1 there was a total of 534 contributions, 400 of which were captured at community-based pop-ups and 134 contributions made on our Whittlesea Engage platform.

Participants were given the opportunity to contribute in two ways, a fund it tool which aligned with the in-person engagement activity and an opportunity to submit an online survey. Results from this survey will help Council understand the priorities in different areas and also inform other Council projects, including the integrated planning framework.

A snapshot of consultation activities and community participation is below:

Community participation



Organic posts reached 7,600 people and were engaged with 263 times. Ninety people clicked through from Facebook to the Engage Whittlesea platform. The social media paid advertising reached 13,552 people and resulted in 303 people clicking through to Council's website.



We hosted 15 community-based pop-ups across the municipality with over 400 people participating in our engagement activity. A morning and afternoon pop-up was held at the Citizenship Ceremony at Civic Centre, giving us a great insight into the priorities of our newest Australian Citizens.



The online fund it tool activity was utilised by 41 participants (activity mirrored in in person community pop ups). A further 93 participants completed the community priorities survey.

Below: In-person Community Participation Demographics snapshot

Community Priorities | In-person Community Participation Demographics snapshot

Gender Participation

Female | **63%**

Male | **37%**

Other | **1%**



Age Range

Ranged from under 15 years to 75+ years. The top 3 ages for participation:

34 - 44 years | **23%**

64- 74 years | **22%**

Under 15 years | **15%**



Suburb Participation

All City of Whittlesea suburbs participated with the top 3 being:

Wollert | **15%**

South Morang & Lalor | **12%**

Epping | **11%**

Language

46% Speak a language other than English at home



Source: Engage Whittlesea Community Priorities project page; Pop-up demographics 2023.

Our community-based pop-ups attracted many contributors, 46% of which speak a language other than English at home. Below is a snapshot of the diverse languages spoken at home by participants, emphasising the rich multicultural community in our municipality.



Above: Languages spoken in households in the City of Whittlesea

What we heard – in-person

In Phase 1 of the consultation, participants at community-based pop-ups were provided with 20 *priorities for the future* listed across three dot boards (see below). Participants were provided with five dots and asked to choose the top priorities that are most important to them. Some picked five different priorities, but others chose to put multiple stickers on a priority that they are passionate about such as safety.

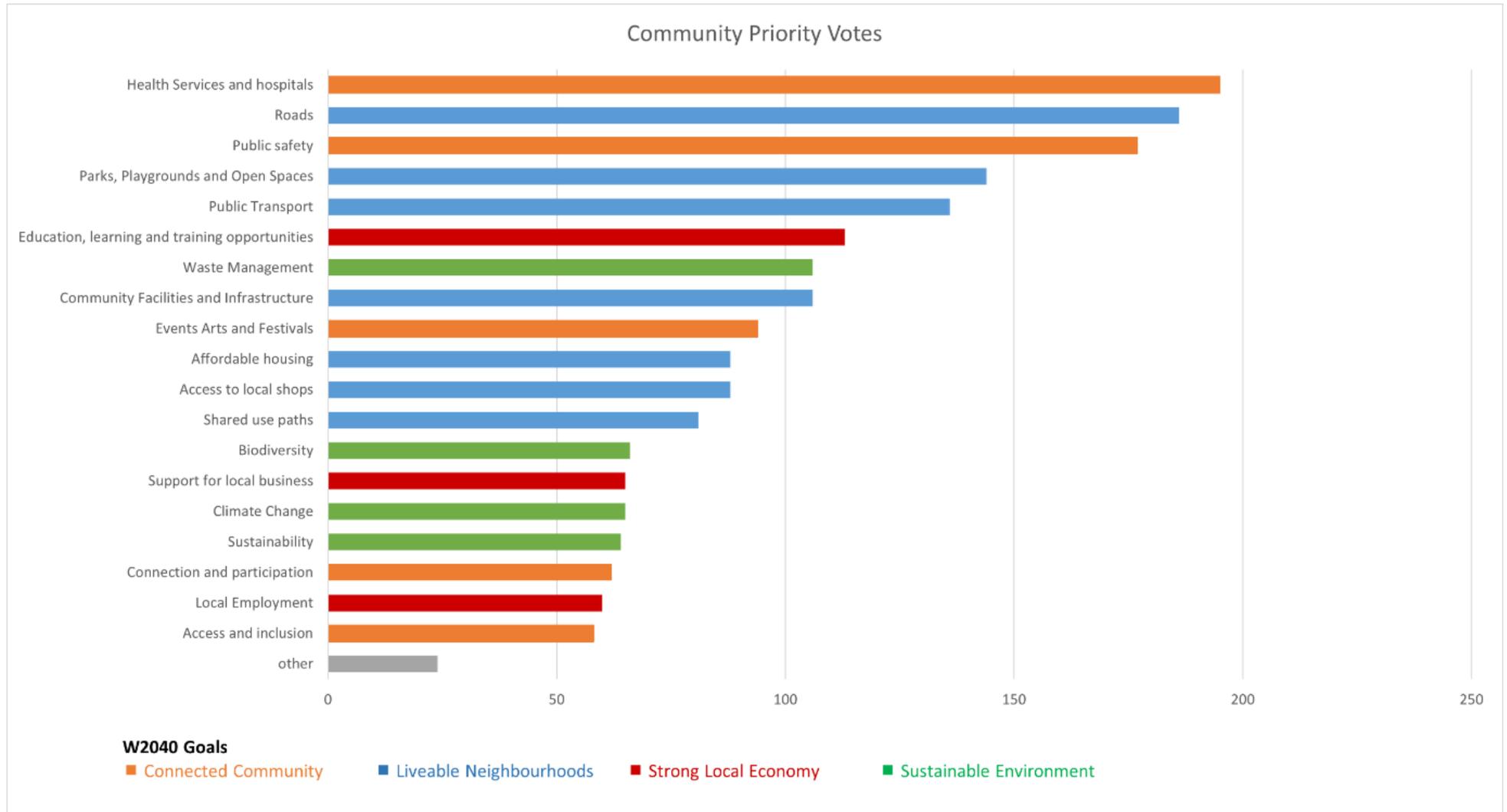


Above: Activity boards used during Phase 1 community-based pop-ups

This activity mirrored the *fund it – where would you spend your money* activity on the project Engage page.

These activities were designed to understand what was most important to the community in each district and the areas they think funding should be allocated.

After hearing from 534 community members from a diverse cross-section of our community across all areas in the City of Whittlesea, we learnt that the top five priorities for our community across the municipality is more funding for Health Services and Hospitals, specifically an increase in the number of medical practitioners to reduce the wait times for health services. An upgrade to roads is the also a priority for many, particularly in our established suburbs, Lalor, Thomastown and Epping. Refer to graph below for actual figures.



Attendees at Council Citizenship ceremonies were also offered the opportunity to participate in the consultation, 64 new Australian Citizens took up this offer and provided feedback at the ceremonies held in August 2023. Improved access and wait times for Health Services and Hospitals is the main priority for this group, closely followed by Education, Learning and Training opportunities. This is shared with Council's Advocacy team for consideration.

Amongst our other cultural and linguistically diverse community groups, safety was a top priority for many, expressing concerns about lack of lighting, tripping hazards on pathways and excessive speed of drivers in their areas.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES | TOP 3 PRIORITY AREA THEMES BY DISTRICT

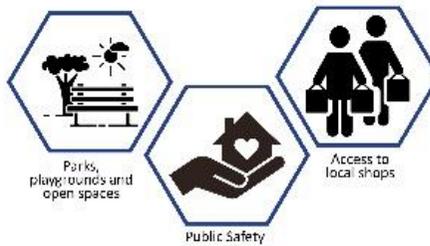
DISTRICT 1

Whittlesea Township and Rural Surrounds



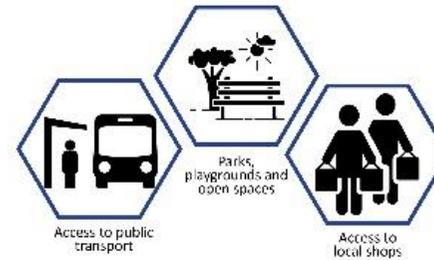
DISTRICT 2

Donnybrook



DISTRICT 3

Wollert and Epping North



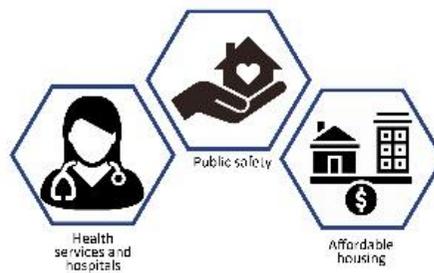
DISTRICT 4

South Morang, Mernda, and Doreen



DISTRICT 5

Thomastown, Lalor and Epping



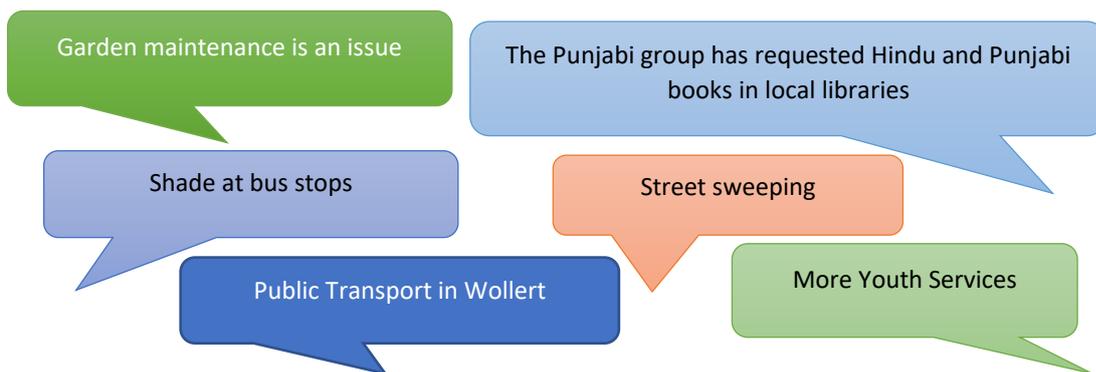
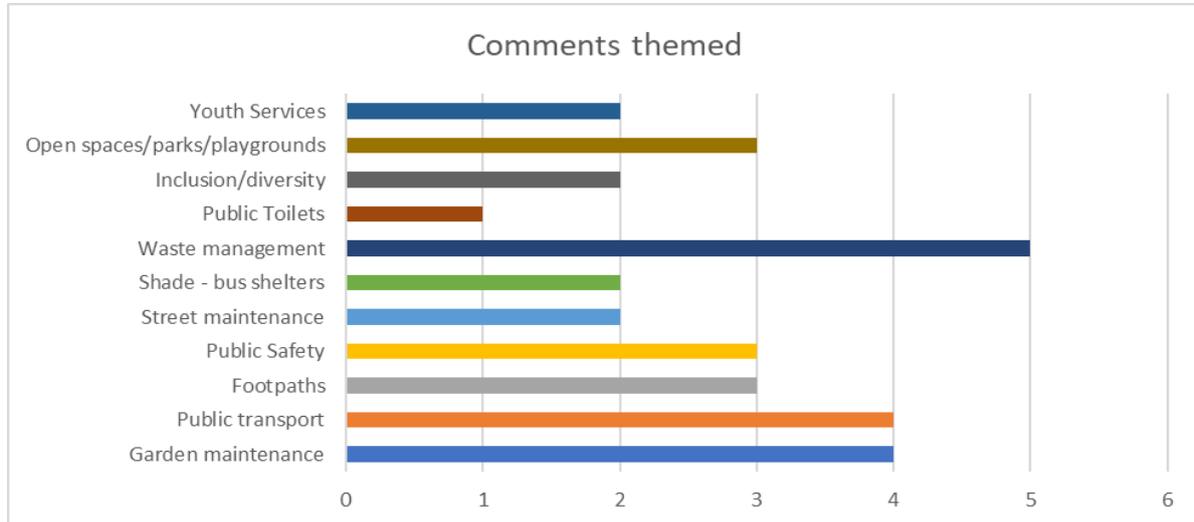
DISTRICT 6

Bundoora and Mill Park



Above: breakdown of priorities in each area of the municipality shared at in-person engagement opportunities.

There was the opportunity for participants to provide comments when identifying their priority areas. The comments captured have been grouped into the below themes and a selection of the narrative shared.



Opportunities

Respondents shared some further opportunities, some of which may be out of scope of this project. These have been themed below:

Public Transport



Four respondents from the Whittlesea Township suggested a V Line connection from the township to Wallan. Three participants in Wollert would like to see more shade at bus stops.

Off- Leash Dog Park



Many respondents who live in Wollert are dog owners and would like to see an off-leash dog park in the area.

Youth Services



Respondents under the age of 18 years made up 17% of respondents. Feedback captured was focussed on their desire for more activities for youth in our community, particularly in Whittlesea Township and Mernda.

What we heard – online

A total of 93 people completed the Community Priority survey online. This survey was designed to inform a number of key strategies and plans being developed by Council. Below is a snapshot of the demographics of those that completed the survey online.

Engage Whittlesea | Online Community Priorities Participation Snapshot

Gender

Female | **75%**
 Male | **22%**
 Prefer not to say | **1%**



Age Range

Residents who participated range from 0-15 years to 66+ years, with the top 3 participants being:

- 35 - 44 years | **40%**
- 25- 34 years | **18%**
- 45 - 54 years | **17%**



CALD Participation

Participants who identified as speaking a language other than English at home | **66%**



Accessibility

Participants who reported caring for an older person or a person with a disability, and those who identify as living with a disability:

- Unpaid Carer of an older person | **5%**
- Unpaid Carer of a person with a disability | **9%**
- Person living with a disability | **14%**



Suburb Participation

The participants lived across all suburbs, with the top 5 contributors being:

- Doreen | **18%**
- Lalor | **18%**
- Epping | **14%**
- Wollert | **18%**
- Whittlesea/Mill Park | **14%**

Type of Household

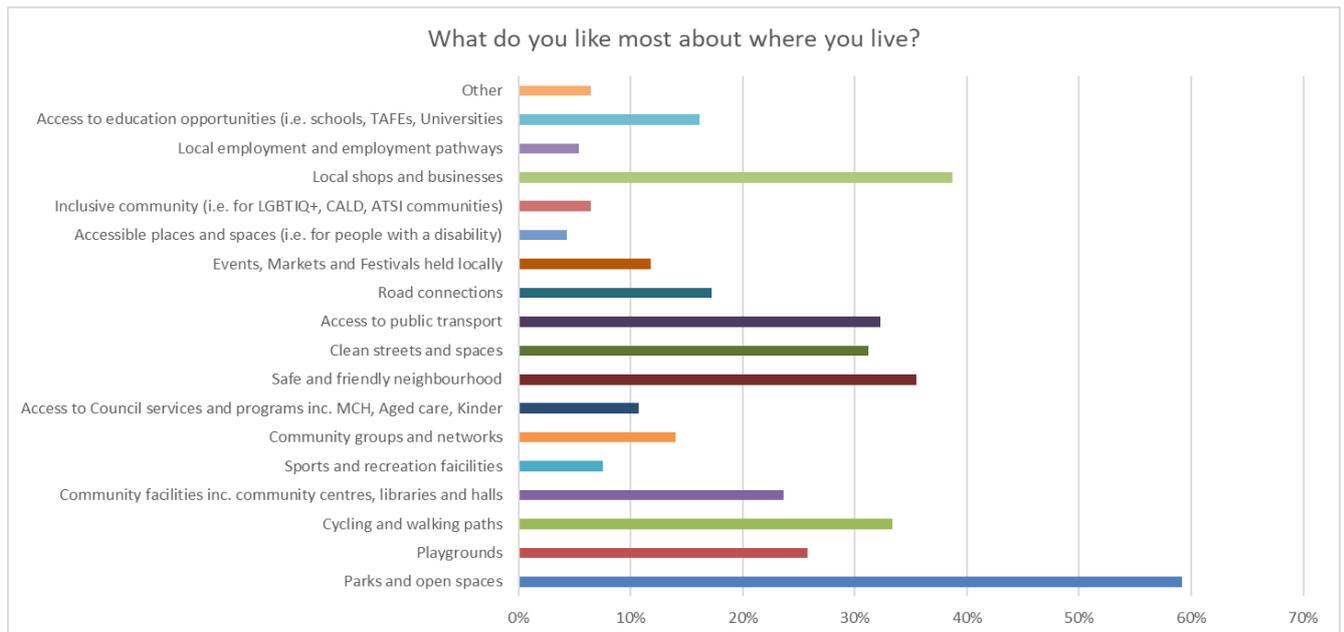
The participants lived in a range household types, with the top 5 being:

- Couple with children youngest 15-17 | **35%**
- Couple with no children | **20%**
- Single person household | **18%**
- Couple with children youngest 18+ | **9%**
- One parent family children under 15 | **5%**

We asked community what was important to them in their local area and what they would like to see more of. The results are as follows.

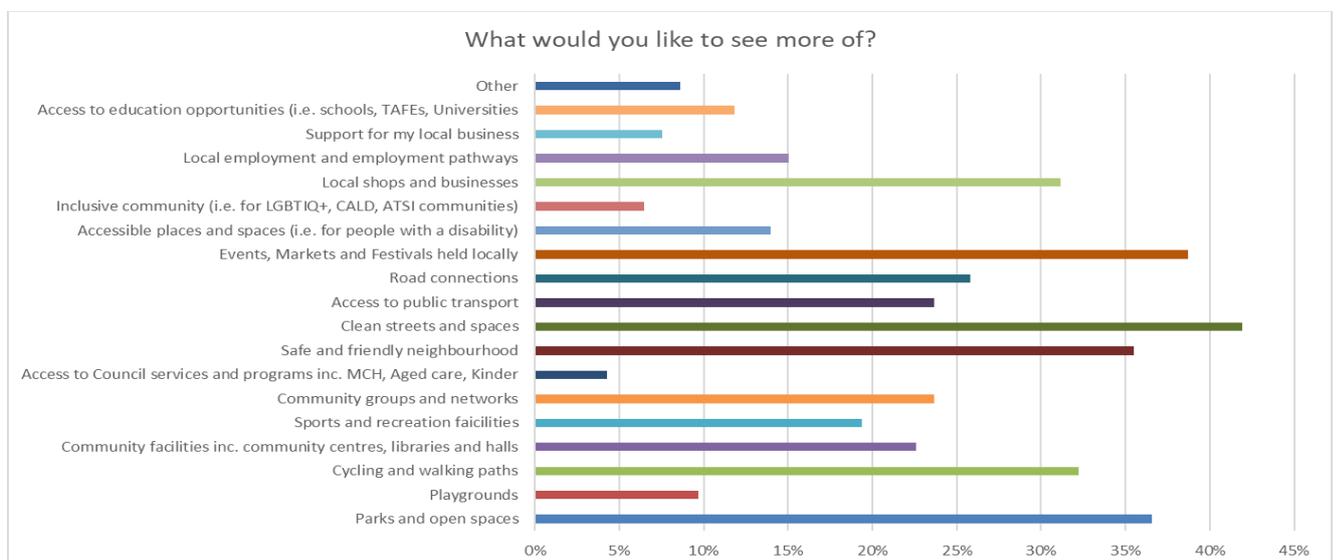
What do you like most about where you live.

Participants were asked to select up to five options from the list provided. Parks and open spaces was liked most with 59% of respondents selecting this option. Local shops and business were the next highest with 39%, closely followed by safe and friendly neighbourhood (35%), cycling and walking paths (33%), access to public transport (32%) and clean streets and open spaces (31%).



What would you like to see more of?

Participants were able to select up to five options from the list provided. Clean streets and spaces was what most people would like to see more of with 42% of participants selecting this option. Events, Markets and Festivals held locally was the next most selected option with 39%, closely followed by parks and open spaces (37%), safe and friendly neighbourhoods (35%) and cycling and walking paths (32%) rounding out the top five.



Once participants selected the things they'd like to see more of in their local area they were prompted to provide detail on why they would like to see more of their selection. This additional question captured 355 comments across the 18 options. What was shared for each of the 18 options is outlined below as well as a selection of the narrative shared.

Why would you like to see more Parks and open spaces?

A total of 31 people provided feedback on why they would like to see more parks and open spaces. Thirteen comments related to being outside/in nature, seven comments around biodiversity, six comments each on the health benefits and not having enough open space. Other topics included maintenance, make community more appealing, walking dog, high density living and suitable for all ages.

The rate of tree cover in Lalor is bad and getting continually worse with dual occupancy blocks removing entire front and back gardens.

The more parks and open space the more beauty.

With backyards becoming smaller and smaller people need a place to enjoy

Parks and open spaces with more green, native flora and fauna. Partly to mitigate climate change but also provide spaces for people to meet and appreciate large scale nature in an urban setting.

Why would you like to see more Playgrounds?

Nine people provided feedback on why they would like to see more playgrounds. The main reasons were for kids to play (7), suitable for all ages (2), maintenance (2) and closer to home (1).

"For our kids to have space to meet and play. More creative and free play playgrounds."

Why would you like to see more cycling and walking paths?

A total of 29 participants provided feedback on why they would like to see more cycling and walking paths. The themes of comments captured were walking (12), for there to be more connected paths (11), for safety (11), cycling (10) and people utilise them (9). Participants also commented more cycling and walking paths for exercise and health benefits (6), connection to dog paths (6), environmental reasons (4), maintenance (3) and signage (1)

So that paths meet up and are accessible from where I live

I cycle regularly and walk there needs to be more signage

I would love to do both with my children in a safe way. I rather cycle to work but it's unsafe as there isn't enough clear cycling paths on my route to work.

Cycling and walking in the best Exercise as senior citizens Impersonates good mental health and well-being

I would like to be able to go on cycling and walking trips with my family without being concerned about not enough walking paths available

Why would you like to see more Community facilities inc. community centres, libraries and halls?

Twenty-one participants commented on why they would like more community facilities. The themes mentioned most were libraries (9), connectedness (9) and having access to local activities (8). Other themes captured included vulnerable people (2), safe spaces (1), toy library (1) and provide services (1).

"These places bring people together to help educate, prevent loneliness, and can assist with physical wellbeing"

"To bring the community together and give people more free/low cost things to do."

Why would you like to see more Sports and recreation facilities?

A total of 18 people provided feedback on why they would like more sports and recreation facilities. The top themes raised related to the facilities being too far away (9), community health and wellbeing (9), aquatic (5), and netball/basketball courts (4). Other themes mentioned included children wellbeing (3), local sports (3), maintenance, connectedness, update facilities, cricket and soccer/hockey (1).

"Netball and basketball stadium so out of date . Need new stadium with at least 4 new courts and gym indoor swimming pool and rooms for groups for yoga dancing and fitness classes. This would improve the way of life for the youth to join something."

Why would you like to see more Community groups and networks?

Twenty-two participants commented on why they would like to see more community groups and networks. The reasons participants mentioned were connecting with others (14), community involvement (9), health benefits (6) and to reduce isolation (4). Other reasons included needing more Government support, mothers' group, Chinese group, after hours groups and aged community (1).

It's important to keep community alive and increase our networks as neighbours.

For greater community involvement to create and implement ideas to improve our areas both in terms of safety and better socialisation

Why would you like to see more access to Council services and programs inc MCH, Aged care, Kinder?

Four people provided comments about why they would like to have more access to Council services and programs. Comments included access for younger families for childcare and kinder, access for disability persons and feeling isolated in Whittlesea Township.

Why would you like to see more of A safe friendly neighbourhood?

A total of 26 participants provided feedback about why they would like to see a safer friendly neighbourhood. The top theme, from 21 people, was because people wanted to feel safe where they live. Thirteen commented that crime and illegal behaviour was an issue where they live. Other comments were road safety (3), having more police presence (3), youth behaviour (2), lighting (2), elderly, LGBTQI+, CCTV and to increase community interaction (1).

The more friendly the neighbourhood the more people will be inclined to interact with one another on the street

To feel safe in my home and community

I often don't feel safe. Some streets/parks/paths are poorly lit

With so many neighbourhoods experiencing violence and home invasions I'm very keen for our area to stay safe

Why would you like to see more clean streets and spaces?

Feedback on why they would like to see more clean streets and spaces was received by 34 participants. Sixteen commented that it makes spaces look better, 15 commented about dumped rubbish being a problem and 7 said it gives a sense of pride and community. Other comments included environmental reasons (4), garden maintenance (3), contractors (3) safety and wellbeing (3), playgrounds (3), wildlife (2) and graffiti (1).

I see so much rubbish on the streets and then it eventually ends up in our beautiful creeks. The creeks are a lifeline for all creatures.

It makes me feel proud of where I live

While the council already does a good job, there are still spaces which are used as dumping grounds by irresponsible people, including creeks and waterways.

Who doesn't like a clean street? A clean street will keep the residents healthy, and it is also good for the

Why would you like to see more access to public transport?

Twenty participants provided feedback on why they would like to see more access to public transport. The most common reasons were for ease of getting around (9), more buses (7), to access services and activities (6) and better connectivity (6). Other comments included decreasing road congestion (3), better for environment (1) and Donnybrook station upgraded (1).

“Convenient for people to go to work, study shopping and participate in social activities, can attract more residents and investors too.”

“More frequent bus services.”

Why would you like to see more road connections?

A total of 23 participants provided feedback on why they would like to see more road connections with majority commenting about making traffic flow better (14). Six participants commented that better planning was needed. Other themes raised were road maintenance (5), upgrade and duplicate roads (5) and increased accessibility to main roads (4).

“Advance work on roads in preparation for growth in suburbs instead of reacting to the growth in population”

Number of cars increasing quickly.
Traffic terrible

“There is too much traffic condensed to single lane in certain areas which makes peak hours such a nightmare. More road connections can relieve congestion to the main roads”.

Why would you like to see more Events, Markets and Festivals held locally?

Thirty-six participants provided feedback on why they would like to see more events, markets and festivals held locally. The most common theme with 26 comments was for community connection. Nine commented about wanting more markets and eight commented that it would be good for local business. There were also eight comments about having more local activities instead of travelling out of area. Other themes included family fun (5), there are not enough events (4), tourism (1) and more inclusive/cultural events (1).

I never stay home with kids on the day off. Always looking for fun things to do. Sometimes we need to go to other area to have events. Would be good if we can host more locally.

Local markets selling in season produce close by, instead of having to drive to Bundoora etc.

Good opportunity to connect and make friends in the neighbourhood

Improve community connectivity. Love where you live. Engaging in social events

Community events to bring a warm and friendly feel

Why would you like to see more accessible places and spaces?

Thirteen participants commented on why they would like to see more accessible places and spaces. The most common theme was about inclusion (7), followed by persons that live with disability or care someone with disability (5). Other themes included having more opportunity (4), playgrounds (2), neurodiverse friendly (1) and sports facilities (1).

“More neurodiverse opportunities for families to play and sporting outlets with trained affordable staff”

“It’s hard living with a disability, people need to be able to get out in nature.”

Why would you like to see more Inclusive community (i.e.: for LGBTIQ+, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities)?

Five participants provided feedback on why they would like to see a more inclusive community. Overall, the comments related to being accepting and embracing all members of our community.

“Because we should strive to accept everyone.”

“Important to embrace all members of our society”

“People stories are important & diversity has so much to offer”

Why would you like to see more Local shops and businesses?

A total of 28 participants provided feedback about why they would like to see more local shops and businesses. The most common theme, with 20 comments, was their preference to shop local for convenience. Other comments shared included having more shopping strips (7), good for community connection (5), closures/run down (3), local employment (2), café culture (2) and good for tourism (1).



Why would you like to see more local employment and employment pathways?

A total of 14 participants provided feedback on why they would like to see more local employment and employment pathways, with 50% saying they would like to work closer to home (7). Other themes included good for the youth (3), no employment pathways near me (3), would like to travel less (3), rely on public transport (1) and school hours (1).

“To empower the youth in gaining access to local employment opportunities and in entering the workforce.”

“Encourage growth and employment opportunities closer to people’s homes”

Why would you like to see more support for my local business?

Six participants commented about supporting local business, with comments centred around it being beneficial for the community and encourage local businesses to stay and grow.

“Thriving local business improves many other aspects of the community.”

Why would you like to see more access to education opportunities?

Eleven comments were shared about why they wanted more access to education opportunities. Nine comments focussed on needing more local access to opportunities as there are no local options. Five comments related specifically to travelling too far to get education opportunities.

“Children and adults have to travel a long way to access such opportunities 1 -2 hours which is not sustainable long term for a work life balance.”

“No local TAFES or universities in our immediate area. Leads to heavy traffic due to people having to travel further for these.”

“So the youth that need to access higher education don't need to go to the city to access better education.”

Next steps

The information gathered from each area will inform the development of the *draft 2024-25 Budget* and the *2024-25 Community Plan Action Plan*. The feedback captured has also been used to inform the development of other key plans and strategies Council are working on to make Whittlesea A Place for All.

Thank you again to everyone who participated in Phase 1 of the community engagement by sharing feedback. Council will conduct further consultation later this year to ensure we haven't missed anything, before presenting the *draft 2024-25 Budget* and *2024-25 Community Plan Action Plan* to the community for feedback in March/April 2024.

Appendix 1

Options presented for survey participants to select from when commenting on what they like most about their local area and what they want to see more of.

- Parks and open spaces
- Playgrounds
- Cycling and walking paths
- Community facilities including community centres, library, and halls
- Sports and recreation facilities
- Community groups and networks
- Access to Council services and programs
- Safe and friendly neighbourhoods
- Clean streets and spaces
- Access to public transport
- Road connections
- Events, Markets and Festivals held locally
- Accessible places and spaces (ie for people with disability)
- Inclusive community (ie for LGBTIQ, culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities)
- Local shops and businesses
- Local employment and employment pathways
- Access to education opportunities.