

Draft Green Wedge Management Plan 2022-2032

For consultation



Yan Yean Reservoir



City of
Whittlesea



River Red Gum, South Morang

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.

Artwork created by Mandy Nicholson Wurundjeri artist, contains traditional Wurundjeri motifs and represents how we are connected to the Earth, just like our fingerprints.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
CoW	City of Whittlesea
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DEDJTR	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
DJPR	Departments of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
GWAL	Green Wedges and Agricultural Land Review
GWMP	Green Wedge Management Plan
UGB	Urban Growth Boundary
VCAT	Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

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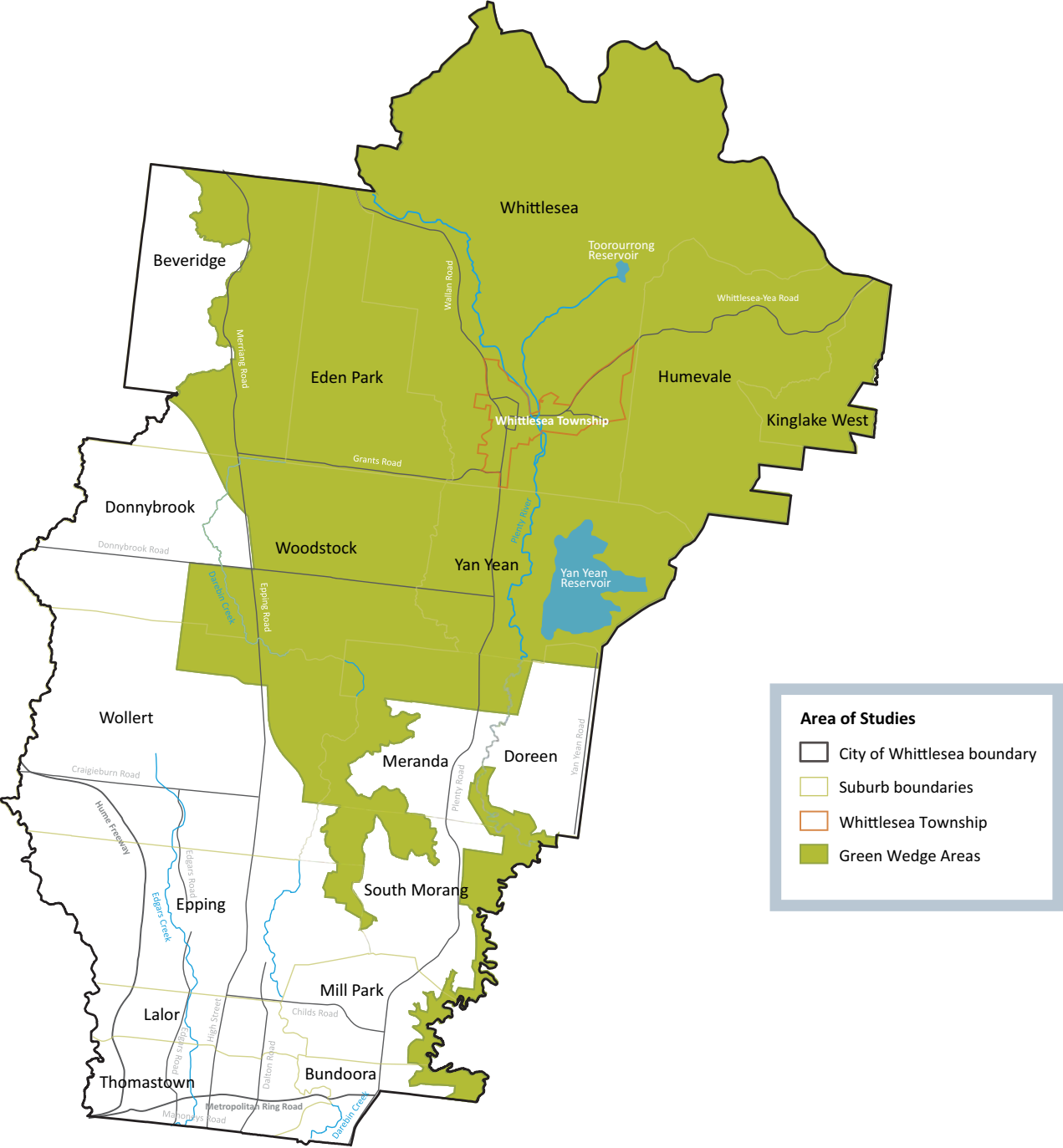
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Yan Yean Reservoir, Yan Yean





Map 1. Whittlesea Green Wedge



Executive Summary

Over 60% of the City of Whittlesea is rural or non-urban land currently protected from urban development. Officially known as the '**Green Wedge**', this land is home to productive agricultural land, scenic landscapes, heritage places, rural living, National Parks, forests, waterways, reservoirs and nationally significant flora and fauna.

The Green Wedge is the lungs of the City of Whittlesea and metropolitan Melbourne – its plants and soil clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, lower the temperature and reduce the risk of flood in extreme weather events.

The Green Wedge is the heart that connects us – its heritage places, open space and landscapes are where we walk, play and relax with family, friends and neighbours.

It is the green food bowl that feeds us – its farms and markets are where some of us work or get fresh local fruits and vegetables.

Above all, it is the land that nourishes us and it will continue doing so for our children and grandchildren.

Green Wedges are established, planned and protected by the Victoria Government's legislative and policy framework. The State Government also requires that all Councils containing Green Wedge areas must prepare a Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP) as a framework for managing changes.

In preparing the Green Wedge Management Plan 2022-2032 (the GWMP), over 100 community members told us their vision and priorities for the Whittlesea Green Wedge through various consultation activities. Results from community consultation, in conjunction with Council's own background research, reveal challenges in the Whittlesea Green Wedge, including land speculation, land uses conflicts, natural hazards and rising farming costs. There are also emerging opportunities especially in the areas of supporting local food production, promoting the visitor economy and diversifying farm income.

The GWMP 2022-2032 proposes a vision, objectives and Strategic Directions in response to these challenges and opportunities. The vision outlines the preferred future direction for the Whittlesea Green Wedge, the objectives articulate what success looks like on the ground in achieving the vision, and the Strategic Directions articulate high level strategies that will guide Council's journey to achieve the vision and objectives. An Implementation Plan will be developed which will identify key actions and measures for success in achieving the Strategic Directions and objectives of the Plan.

The new GWMP, building on the successful implementation of the GWMP 2011-2021, reaffirms the community's priorities in protecting biodiversity, natural landscapes and rural characters of the

Whittlesea Green Wedge. The plan also envisages a stronger and balanced role for the Whittlesea Green Wedge in supporting a strong local economy through local food production and the visitor economy. The proposed Green Wedge Vision, Objectives and Strategic Directions is structured to best align with the overarching goals of Council's Community Plan - Whittlesea 2040: A place for all.

Finally, whilst our community hold diverse opinions on how the Green Wedge should be managed, there is common agreement that it should be protected now and into the future. In this context, it is an important key direction of the GWMP that Council continue to engage and empower community members in planning and caring for our Green Wedge.



GREEN WEDGE VISION

Our Green Wedge is part of a connected ecosystem where biodiversity, natural assets and resources are enhanced and protected from urban encroachment.

Our Green Wedge provides for rural land uses and development, and supports economic opportunities in sustainable agriculture and the visitor economy¹ that respect the environmental significance, rural and landscape character of the Green Wedge.

Our Green Wedge protects and promotes its rich Aboriginal and post contact heritage.

Our Green Wedge connects and supports a diverse, resilient and respectful community who are empowered to take care of the land.



Whittlesea 2040 Goal - Sustainable Environment

Green Wedge Objectives

- Our Green Wedge's natural landscapes are valued, healthy and biodiverse.
- Our Green Wedge is sustainably managed and is resilient to climate change and natural disasters.
- Our Green Wedge waterways are healthy and clean.
- Our Green Wedge protects and enhances greening on both council and non-council land.

Strategic Directions

- 1.1 Improve the management and protection of biodiversity.
- 1.2 Partner with landowners and land managers to ensure water is managed in an integrated and effective manner in the Green Wedge.
- 1.3 Ensure our residents and our environment benefit from a diverse, colourful, and healthy City Forest that connects people to people, people to nature, and people to place.
- 1.4 Partner with landowners and other government agencies to improve soil health.

Whittlesea 2040 Goal - Liveable Neighbourhoods

Green Wedge Objectives

- High value landscape features and significant views² are identified and protected in the Green Wedge.
- Communities understand the purpose of the Green Wedge zones and are supported to conduct appropriate land use, development and management on the land.
- Settlement in our Green Wedge is sensitive to the environment and is resilient to climate change and natural disasters.
- Our Green Wedge enjoys a safe and fit for purpose transport network that meets the needs and expectations of our community.
- Our Green Wedge has a clearly defined, permanent urban-rural interface that offer high ecological, recreational, agricultural values.

Strategic Directions

- 2.1 Protect non-urban breaks and enhance landscape amenity and rural character.
- 2.2 Discourage new settlement in areas prone to extreme natural hazards.
- 2.3 Provide safe and fit for purpose local road network and support active travel modes.
- 2.4 Protect the Green Wedge from further urban encroachment and improve management of the urban and rural interface.
- 2.5 Direct urban uses towards designated Whittlesea township area and areas within the Urban Growth Boundary

² Such as the non-urban break between Masons Road and the Whittlesea Township along the Plenty Road corridor and the views to the Plenty Ranges, the Great Dividing Range and Quarry Hills.

Whittlesea 2040 Goal - Strong Local Economy

Green Wedge Objectives

- The importance of agriculture in the Green Wedge is well understood by our community.
- Our Green Wedge supports activities that enhance agricultural and environmental values and discourages uses that are incompatible with the purposes of the Green Wedge.
- Local agribusinesses are supported to facilitate ongoing viability and are encouraged to apply sustainable and innovative practices.
- Our Green Wedge supports a visitor economy that is sustainable and sensitive to the environmental and social impacts. The natural and built assets are recognised in the destination promotion activities.
- Our Green Wedge supports renewable energy production, protects existing operation and future opportunities for extractive industry and regionally significant waste management assets that are compatible with Green Wedge values.

Strategic Directions

- 3.1 Improve understanding of the value of agriculture in the Green Wedge to provide for appropriate use and development.
- 3.2 Support local agribusinesses and the visitor economy to grow, be sustainable and prepared for climate change.
- 3.3 Work with State Government to provide for future infrastructure and green energy needs.

Whittlesea 2040 Goal - Connected Community

Green Wedge Objectives

- Our Green Wedge community takes pride in Green Wedge and is empowered with the knowledge and opportunities to look after it.
- Our Green Wedge community enjoys better accessibility to open space facilities, safe and fit-for-purpose road and public transport infrastructure for greater social and economic resilience.
- Our Green Wedge enhances, protects and promotes places of cultural significance.
- Our Green Wedge community and Council, partner with Traditional Owners in various practices that Care for Country.

Strategic Directions

- 4.1 Understand and support the diverse needs of our rural community for environmental, social and economic resilience.
- 4.2 Better connect the Green Wedge with our communities via communication, placemaking and programs.
- 4.3 Engage and empower community members on various aspects of caring for and managing the Green Wedge.
- 4.4 Partner with Traditional Owners to support the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage, improve land and water management and other Caring for Country practices in the Green Wedge



IN THIS SECTION:

- **What is the Green Wedge**
- **Purpose of the Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP)**
- GWMP & the Whittlesea Planning Scheme
- GWMP & Other Council Strategies
- Structure of the GWMP 2022-2032



Quarry Hills, South Morang

Introduction

What is the Green Wedge

The Green wedge refers to the non-urban areas of metropolitan Melbourne that lie outside the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB).

Over 60% of the City of Whittlesea is rural, or non-urban, land currently protected from urban development. Officially known as the 'Green Wedge', this land covers an area more than three times the size of Phillip Island. It is home to productive agricultural land, rural living, scenic landscapes, heritage places, National Parks, forests, waterways, reservoirs and nationally significant flora and fauna. (Refer to **Map 1. Whittlesea Green Wedge**)

The Wurundjeri Willum clan is the Traditional Owner of the land that now forms the Whittlesea Green Wedge. The Wurundjeri Willum clan is part of the Wurundjeri tribe and Woi Wurrung language group: one of the many language groups that make up the Kulin Nation.

There are also small areas on the northern boundary of our municipality (the north facing slopes of the Great Dividing Range) where Taungurung people are the Traditional Custodians.

The City of Whittlesea's Green Wedge consists of the Whittlesea Township and the broader rural area which surrounds it, including Eden Park, Humevale, Kinglake West, South Morang (part), Woodstock, Wollert (part), Donnybrook (part), Beveridge (part), Mernda (part), Doreen (part), Whittlesea (part), and Yan Yean.

Purpose of the Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP)

The Green Wedge is dynamic and constantly evolving. The State Government requires that all Councils³ containing the Green Wedge areas must prepare a Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP) as a framework for managing changes.

The GWMP 2022-2032 proposes a vision, objectives and Strategic Directions for the Whittlesea Green Wedge. The vision outlines the preferred future direction for Whittlesea Green Wedge, the objectives articulate what success looks like on the ground in achieving the vision, and the Strategic Directions articulate high level strategies that will guide Council's journey to achieve the vision and objectives.

In preparing the Green Wedge Management Plan 2022-2032 (the GWMP), over 100 community

³ The Planning and Environment Act 1987 identify the 17 fringe councils including the City of Whittlesea.

members told us their vision and priorities for the Whittlesea Green Wedge through various consultation activities. Outcomes from the consultation process, in conjunction with Council's own background research, have informed the development of every aspect of the GWMP. This will inform the development of an Implementation Plan which will identify key actions and measures for success in achieving the Strategic Directions and objectives of the Plan.

It is important to note that in identifying local directions for the Green Wedge, the GWMP must operate within the existing Victorian legislative and policy framework (refer to Federal and State Framework – Page 11) For instance, the Whittlesea GWMP does not change things such as the Urban Growth Boundary or override any other policies or planning or zoning controls set out by the State Government.

GWMP & the Whittlesea Planning Scheme

The State Government practice note sets out the relationship between a GWMP and the respective planning scheme. Through the Whittlesea Planning Scheme, the GWMP articulates the Strategic Direction for the Green Wedge and should:

- ensure the vision, role and purpose of the Green Wedge is identified
- confirm the green wedge zoning and the schedules to these zones
- ensure identified values, environmental assets and resources are appropriately identified and protected in the planning scheme through tools such as planning scheme overlays and local planning policies
- consider the need to provide further guidance in relation to discretionary uses and developments within the Green Wedge through the Local Planning Policy Framework. (DEWLP 2015)

GWMP & Other Council Strategies

The GWMP focuses on land use, development and sustainable land management. While Council is involved in and actively works with partner institutions on a wide range of other issues ranging from service provision to emergency management in our Green Wedge areas, these activities are and will continue to be guided by strategies/plans other than the GWMP. The Local Planning Policy Framework section (Page 11) outlines the key Council strategies that interact with the GWMP in supporting our Green Wedge residents and business community. (i.e. delete the 'and' in between 'Planning and Policy')

Structure of the GWMP 2022-2032

This document contains two parts: *Part A – Setting the Scene* and *Part B – Shaping the future*.

Part A – Setting the Scene focuses on background information of the Green Wedge, including policy context, key features and values of the Whittlesea Green Wedge, and the Community and Economic Profile. In addition, Part A also provides a brief summary of the community consultation outcomes.

Part B – Shaping the future proposes an over-arching vision and objectives for the Whittlesea Green Wedge. It also includes discussions of key issues identified through the community consultation and from Council's background research. In response to those key issues, Strategic Directions are developed that will guide Council's journey to achieve the vision and objectives.

PART A:

Setting the Scene

IN THIS SECTION:

- Policy Context
- The Whittlesea Green Wedge
- Community & Economic Profile
- Community Consultation Summary

Part A of the GWMP focuses on the background analysis of the Green Wedge, including the policy context, the key features and values of the Whittlesea Green Wedge and the Community and Economic Profile. Part A also provides a brief summary of the community consultation outcomes

Policy Context

This section outlines the federal, state and local legislative and policy framework within which the GWMP operates.

Federal and State Framework

Green Wedges are established, planned and protected by the Victoria Government's legislative and policy framework.

In 2002, the State Government established an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) around Melbourne to manage outward expansion in a coordinated manner. It also identified 12 Green Wedges within 17 local government areas (refer to **Map 2**. Melbourne's Green Wedges) and put in place legislation and policies to protect these valued Green Wedges.

Plan Melbourne 2017-2050 ('Plan Melbourne') - the city's current metropolitan strategy articulates the State Government's future vision and desired planning outcomes for Melbourne's Green Wedge areas. Importantly, it identifies the Victorian Government's intention to maintain a permanent UGB to strengthen the protection and management of Melbourne's Green Wedges. (see Appendix 2 - *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050* Desired planning outcomes for green wedge and peri-urban areas).

At the time of preparing the GWMP 2022-2032, the State Government is undertaking a Green Wedge Agricultural Land Review (GWAL) with the intent to further strengthen Green Wedge

Map 2. Melbourne's Green Wedges





Quarry Hills Lookout - South Morang

planning provisions and protect agricultural land. Council has been advocating for relevant changes supporting stronger protection of biodiversity conservation and agricultural land through the GWAL review process.

There are other Federal and State Government legislations, policies, strategies and plans that are relevant to social, economic and environmental issues affecting the Green Wedges (refer to **Table 1** below). The Commonwealth's *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (the EPBC Act)* and the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* at the State level are two central pieces of legislation to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places.

In addition to the State Government legislative and policy framework that applies to the 12 Green Wedge areas, it is a State Government requirement that all Councils containing Green Wedge areas must prepare a GWMP that will provide clarity and greater certainty about the future management of individual Green Wedges.

Table 1. State policies, strategies and plans that affecting the Green Wedges

- Water for Victoria (2016)
- Biodiversity (2037-2017)
- Agriculture Victoria Strategy (2017)
- Victoria's Climate Change Framework (2018)
- Helping Victoria Grow: Extractive Resources Strategy (2018)
- Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan (2018)
- Planning Reforms for Animal Industries (2018)
- Integrated Water Management Forums Strategic Directions Statements (2018)
- Regional Tourism Review (2019)
- Land Use Framework Plans for Melbourne's metropolitan regions (under development)

Local Planning Policy Framework

The Whittlesea Planning Scheme, the GWMP and other relevant Council strategies provide the local planning framework for managing the use and development of land in our Green Wedge.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme

The Whittlesea Planning Scheme contains both local provisions and broader state and regional provisions that apply across all relevant municipal planning schemes.

The Whittlesea Planning Scheme contains the following state and regional provisions relevant to Green Wedges:

- Clause 11.01-1R Green Wedges – Metropolitan Melbourne
- Clause 11.03-3S Peri-urban areas
- Clause 51.02 Metropolitan Green Wedge Land: Core Planning Provisions

The Whittlesea Planning Scheme also contains the following local policies relevant to Whittlesea's Green Wedge:

- Clause 02.03 Municipal Planning Strategy – Strategic Directions
- Clause 11.01-1L Green Wedge areas
- Clause 12.01-1L Protection of biodiversity
- Clause 14.01-2L Sustainable agricultural land use
- Clause 15.03-1L Heritage Conservation in Whittlesea

There are three rural zones in the Whittlesea Green Wedge and all of these zones support the use of land for agriculture and biodiversity enhancement. A summary of rural zones in the Whittlesea Planning Scheme is included (refer to **Table 2**).

Table 2. Rural zones applied in Whittlesea Green Wedge

Zone	Description
Rural Conservation Zone	a conservation zone that caters for rural areas with special environmental characteristics.
Green Wedge Zone	a zone that provides for all agricultural uses and limits non rural uses to those that either support agriculture or tourism, or that are essential for urban development but cannot be located in urban areas for amenity or other reasons.
Green Wedge A Zone	<p>a zone that provides for most agricultural uses (i.e. Intensive animal production is prohibited) and limits non rural uses to those that either support agriculture or tourism, or that are essential for urban development but cannot be located in urban areas for amenity or other reasons.</p> <p>The Zone also recognises and protects the amenity of existing rural living areas.</p>

(This table is based on Planning Practice Note 42 – Applying the Rural Zones)

Other Council strategies

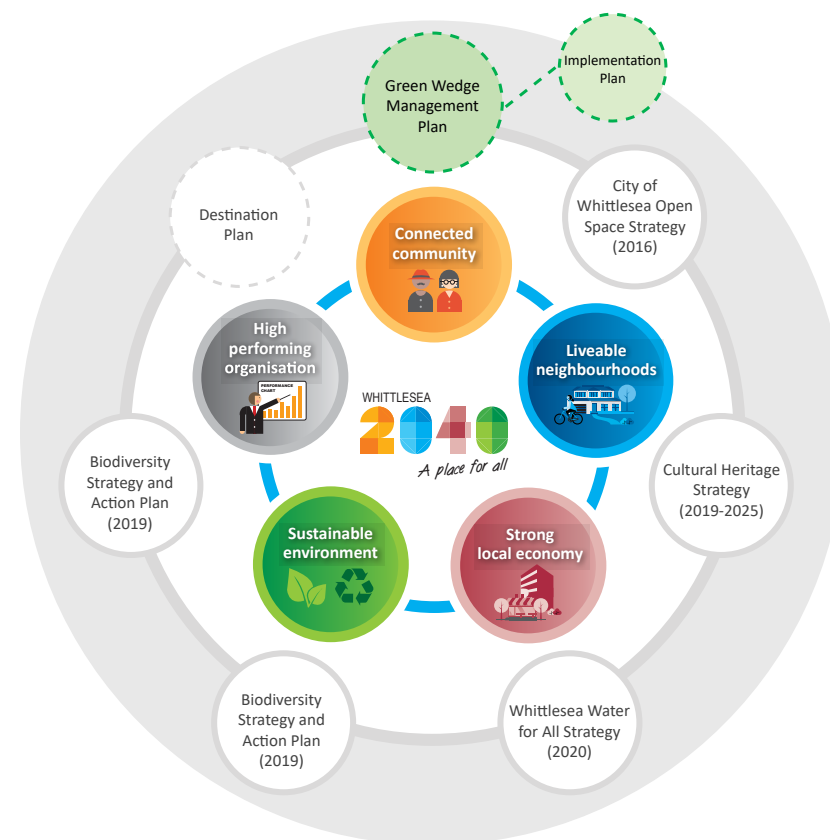
The GWMP focuses on land use, development and sustainable land management. While Council actively works with partner organisations on a wide range of other issues such as service provision, community building, emergency management etc, in our Green Wedge areas, these activities are, and will continue to be guided by strategies/plans other than the GWMP.

Figure 1 outlines the key Council strategies that interact with the GWMP in supporting our Green Wedge residents and business community under the five overarching goals of Whittlesea Community Plan – Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All.

The GWMP recognises and complements a range of Council strategies, policies and plans that all play a crucial role in facilitating ongoing sustainability and prosperity of the green wedge. These include:

- Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All (2018-2040)
- Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2019)

Fig 1. Green Wedge Management Plan and other relevant Council strategies



- Greening Whittlesea City Forest Strategy (2020-2040)
- Whittlesea Water for All Strategy (2020)
- City of Whittlesea Open Space Strategy (2016)
- Cultural Heritage Strategy (2019-2025)
- Investment Attraction Plan (2021-2026)
- Strong Local Economy Strategy (2022-2026)

Council has recently updated Whittlesea 2040 with a new Community Plan (and an integrated Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan). Council will be preparing a Destination Tourism Plan in 2022-2023 which will be of relevance in implementing the GWMP.

The Whittlesea Green Wedge

This section provides a snapshot of the Whittlesea Green Wedge: the physical features of the land and associated values perceived by community and discussion about how Council manage our Green Wedge in partnership with other communities and organisations.

Key Features

The Whittlesea Green Wedge is characterised by its diverse landforms, soil types and land uses. Natural landscapes in the Whittlesea Green Wedge consists mainly of the Highlands – Southern Fall in the north, Victorian Volcanic Plain in the south, and a small area of Central Victorian Uplands in Quarry Hills (insert different natural landscape images).

The following section summarises the key features of the Whittlesea Green Wedge. Significantly, almost half of the land is public land used for closed water catchments, national parks and state forests. Other land uses and characteristics include:

- Significant flora and fauna habitats
- Agricultural activities
- Rural living and small settlements
- Recreation and tourism attraction opportunities
- Scenic landscapes
- Significant Aboriginal and European heritage places
- Extractive resources such as sand, clay, gravel and stone

IN THIS SECTION:

- Policy Context
- **The Whittlesea Green Wedge**
- Community & Economic Profile
- Community Consultation Summary



Whittlesea Green Wedge - Key features

Biodiversity



The Whittlesea Green Wedge is home to a diverse range of native plants and animals, including native grasslands of National and State significance, River Red Gum Grassy Woodland, and forested areas such as Kinglake National Park and Mount Disappointment State Forest. Rural areas provide the majority of habitat for native species, and in some cases contain the only remaining vegetation community within the region. Healthy natural environments and the ecosystem services they support are important for the prosperity and liveability for which Melbourne is renowned.

Landscape



Significant landscapes include the flat agricultural landscape of the Plenty Valley, scattered River Red Gums and majestic Plenty Ranges that provide a scenic backdrop to the city of Melbourne. These rural and natural landscapes provide a sense of place whilst contributing to ecological values, supporting tourism and also being culturally significant. The landscape qualities of the Green Wedge are a part of Melbourne's distinctive character and appeal.

Agriculture



Areas of productive agricultural land support locally grown produce such as olives, wineries, berry farms and cheese products offered for sale at local markets. Although a part time pursuit for many residents, grazing and equestrian activities are also common. Productive agricultural land is a finite resource and plays an important role in contributing to local food supply and making Melbourne a sustainable city. In the Whittlesea Green Wedge, high value is placed on the quality of the rural landscape, contributing an essential liveability element.

Water



The Whittlesea Green Wedge supports the upper and middle catchment areas of the Plenty River, Darebin Creek and Merri Creek. This area contains several closed water supply catchments that contribute to Melbourne's water supply, and is home to the Toorourrong and Yan Yean water storage reservoirs. Waterways, wetlands and floodplains within the municipality provide valuable environmental, social and economic benefits for residents and visitors alike.

Communities & Settlements

The Green Wedge is highly valued for its liveability with many small rural settlements and areas of rural living. The township of Whittlesea is the most significant, containing around half of the rural population. Many residents are attracted to the Green Wedge by the rural lifestyle and sense of community.

Heritage

Before European settlement, the Aboriginal people of the Wurundjeri wilam clan inhabited the area. There are many sites of cultural significance throughout the Green Wedge associated with Aboriginal culture, such as scarred trees, along waterways and stony rises. Remnants of early European settlement occur on rural living lots and broadacre farms, often delineated by dry stone walls, outbuildings and historic hedgerows. These sites hold special meaning for all Melburnians and need to be sustained for future generations.

Tourism & Recreation

The Whittlesea Green Wedge supports a wide range of recreational pursuits, natural attractions and events. Key attractions range from the Country Music Festival to the Whittlesea Agricultural Show. Other attractions include farmers markets, golf courses, leisure recreation, local farm gate products, bushwalking, camping and horse riding trails. These activities deliver important economic, social and environmental benefits to local communities and broader Melbourne.

Extractive Industry

Several extractive industry operations which were previously located within the Whittlesea Green Wedge area have been included within the new UGB, leaving only two of the current Work Authorities partly located within the Green Wedge. Extractive industries play a fundamental role in supporting Melbourne's future development and prosperity.



Whittlesea Green Wedge Values

The Whittlesea Green Wedge community includes people who live or work in the Green Wedge, and those who feel strongly connected with Green Wedge for other environmental, social, economic reasons. In preparing the Whittlesea GWMP 2022-2032, over 100 of those community members told us what aspects of the Green Wedge they value the most through various consultation activities as follows:

- Top 1** The positive effects on my wellbeing from enjoying green natural spaces.
- Top 2** Environmental significance of the area - Just the existence of natural landscapes and features like hills, trees, waterways and animals.
- Top 3** Environmental benefits (e.g. reduced pollution in the air and water, reduced heat or flood impact from extreme weather events).
- Top 4** Local food produced in the area.
- Top 5** Local jobs in agriculture and related industries.
- Top 6** Other values such as cultural and spiritual connection to the land.

Figure 2 illustrates the diverse values of the Green Wedge held by the broader Whittlesea communities. Importantly, many of them highlight that ‘environmental values’ such as biodiversity and natural landscapes and its associated benefits are most important to them and include:

- Protects areas of landscape amenity, biodiversity and environmental significance
- Reduces pollution in the air and water
- Mitigates impacts to urban areas from extreme climate events like flood and heat
- Provides access to green and blue open space for physical and mental health
- Supports the overall liveability of Melbourne

Fig 2. Values of Whittlesea Green



The importance of access to healthy local food has been a recurring message from current and previous community consultation and Council's background research. A Food System background report (CoW, 2015, p24) revealed that access to affordable healthy food is a critical issue for our low and middle-income groups. In 2018, our community told us that 'ensuring safe and healthy local food options in a climate constrained future' was important to them (Whittlesea 2040 Community Engagement Report, 2018: p58). The effects of the pandemic are expected to only further amplify the importance of local food production.

The Green Wedge offers significant potential economic benefit of providing more local jobs via agriculture, agri-tourism and other agribusiness opportunities. According to Deloitte Access Economics (2016), the estimated existing economic contribution of food production and manufacturing in Greater Melbourne's Green Wedge and peri urban area is \$2.45 billion per annum to the city's regional economy. In addition, it creates 21,001 full-time equivalent jobs. The City of Whittlesea is perfectly located to facilitate growth in food production and manufacturing, with the recent relocation of the Melbourne Market to Epping, the proposed Melbourne Food Innovation and Export Hub (MFIH), and the municipality's direct access to Melbourne's extensive transport infrastructure and close in proximity to Melbourne's Airport.

Our community places high value on cultural and spiritual connection to the Green Wedge land and would like to see greater focus on protection and increasing understanding of places of cultural significance.

Managing Whittlesea's Green Wedge

Managing Whittlesea's Green Wedge is a shared responsibility and involves a wide range of stakeholders including:

- Traditional Owners
- Private landowners, residents and local business owners
- Government departments and authorities, utility and power companies and service agencies such as Department of Transport, Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria who manage significant land holdings, natural features, state assets or local facilities
- Volunteers and community groups including Landcare groups, "Friends of" groups, Country Fire Authority, dedicated community interest groups and sporting groups

It is important to recognise that Council has different roles and responsibilities in the management of the Green Wedge. Increasingly, the City of Whittlesea also needs to partner with the Federal and State Governments, other local councils and organisations who share a common interest in managing our Green Wedge areas. Council's role can be summarised as follows:

- We provide essential community services and infrastructure (Provider)
- We advocate to state and federal governments for environmental and planning protection, funding of community services and infrastructure projects. (Advocate)
- We support and work with local community groups, organisations and government agencies to deliver environmental protection, services and infrastructure projects the community needs (Facilitator)
- We prepare local planning policy to guide the use and development of land and determine planning applications in our Green Wedge. Council also issues permits for native vegetation, septic tank, local laws, land management etc (Regulator)
- We support strong local economy in the Green Wedge context through areas such as agriculture and the visitor economy (Facilitator)

Community & Economic Profile

This section provides a snapshot of the socio-economic characteristics of the people who live and work in the Whittlesea Green Wedge. It also briefly discusses the food and fibre economy in the City of Whittlesea which is relevant in the Green Wedge context.

Community Snapshot

Approximately 3.7% of the City of Whittlesea's population lives in the Green Wedge. Of those 8,855 people, 64 per cent live in the Whittlesea Township (ID Demographic Profile, 2020).

A comparison of population in 2021 and 2011 shows the following trend:

- Slow population growth and an increasingly higher proportion of people living in the Whittlesea Township
- An ageing population overall, with a minor but steady decrease in average household size
- A far more culturally homogenous community compared to the rest of the municipality

One reverse trend worth noting is the change in the level of education of Green Wedge residents. In 2011, 42% of our Green Wedge residents had some form of qualification⁴, slightly below the municipal average at 46%. By 2016, this had increased to 47% of Green Wedge residents, compared to an overall drop in the municipal average of 39% of residents with some form of qualification.

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- Community Consultation Summary

In comparison with the rest of the municipality, other notable features about our Green Wedge residents include:

- Highest median age and highest volunteering rate
- Higher rate of disengaged youth – defined as 15-24-year-olds who are not in employment, looking for work or in full-time study
- Considerably higher proportion of Technicians and Trade Workers and a slightly higher proportion of Managers or Professionals
- A notable trend of the 14-25 and 45-59 age cohort moving out of the Green Wedge
- Higher and growing proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders population

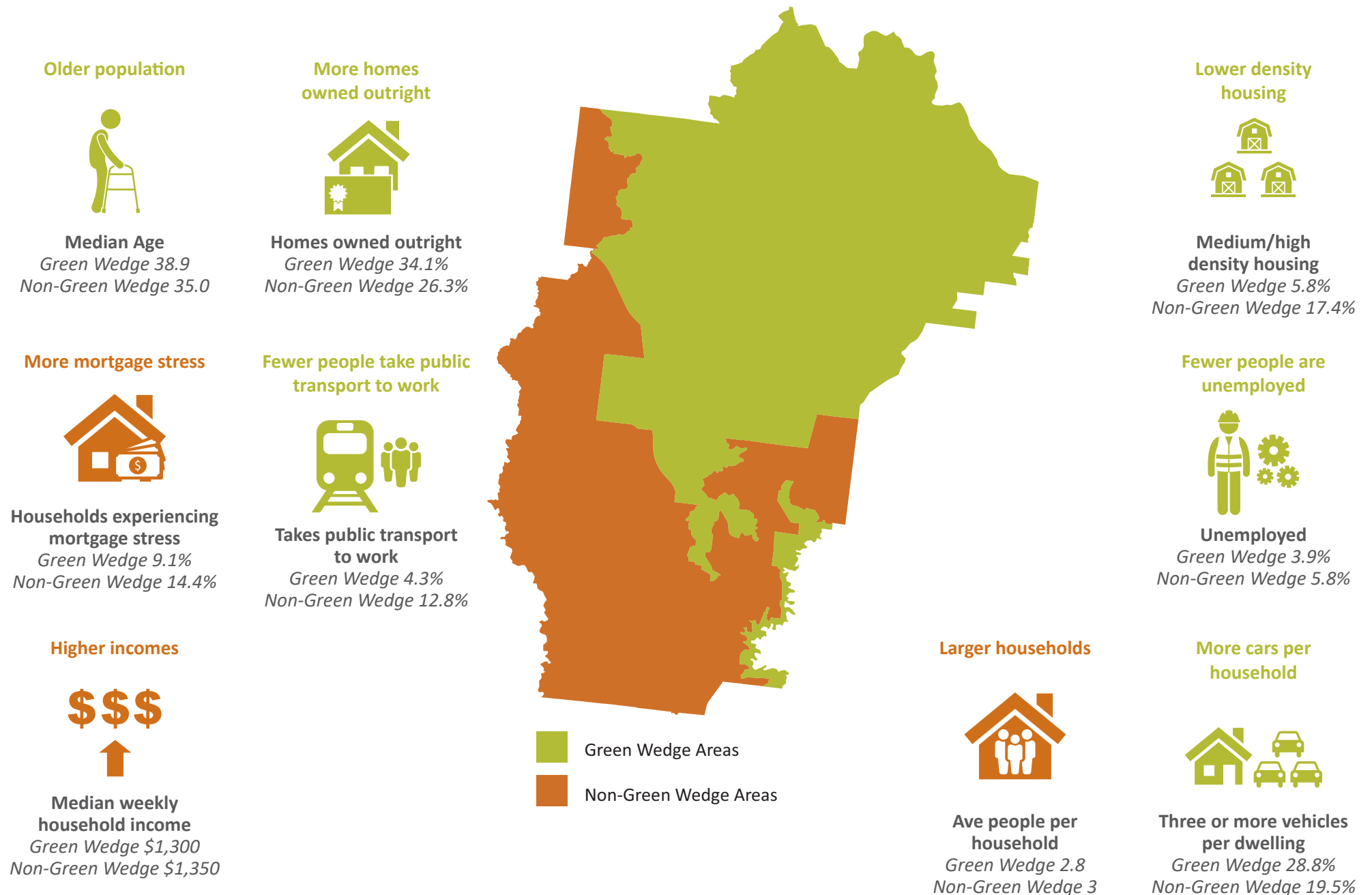
It is worth noting that the data above is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data which was collected before the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic could continue to disrupt the trends observed in the past decade. According to the ABS, in the March 2021 quarter alone, there was a net loss of 11,800 people from capital cities to regional Australia, the largest quarterly net loss on record. Greater Melbourne (including Green Wedges) has a net loss of 8,300 people in the March 2021 quarter, the second largest net loss among capital cities.⁵

A report commissioned by Council suggests that it is too early to tell how the outward migration from Greater Melbourne to regional areas might have implications for our Green Wedge area (SGS, 2021, Whittlesea 2040 COVID 19 Impacts Research Report). Council would need to closely monitor the implication as part of the GWMP implementation.

⁴ In this case, it refers to Vocational, Diploma or Advanced Diploma, Bachelor or Higher degree

⁵ Source: ABS, Regional internal migration estimates, provisional, March 2021, Regional internal migration estimates, provisional, March 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

Fig 3. Green Wedge Socioeconomic Profile



Source: ID Demographic Profile <https://profile.id.com.au/Whittlesea> (2016 Census data)

Local Food & Fibre Economy

In Victoria, the value of food and fibre exports is projected to increase significantly, reaching a total of \$28 billion by 2030. Melbourne's North is expected to double its output to \$5 billion and create an additional 7,000 jobs in the sector over the next 10 years (North Link, 2020, Building Communities, Connecting People, Northern Horizons 2020 Evidence Report).

The City of Whittlesea is perfectly located to facilitate Victoria's growth in the food, fibre and beverage industry, with the proximity of high-quality Green Wedge areas to the Melbourne Market in Epping, the extensive freeway networks and Melbourne's Airport.

Historically, the City of Whittlesea has been a strong, diverse agricultural region servicing Melbourne with a wide array of produce, including meat, milk, wool, grain, fruit, vegetables and eggs. Many influences including the impact of urban development have since changed the extent and overall value and diversity of our agriculture sector.

In 2015/16, the municipality had an agricultural commodity value at around \$83 million with mushrooms being the dominant agricultural commodity. About 84% of the mushrooms (value) produced in Greater Melbourne are produced in the City of Whittlesea. The other main commodity is beef (2.4%) followed by nursery production (2.0%). Fruits such as berries, apricots, apples, pears and peaches comprise only 0.4% of the total value. In addition, there remains a small amount of dairy and egg production in the area. (see **Figure 4. 2015-2016 Agricultural Production in CoW**)

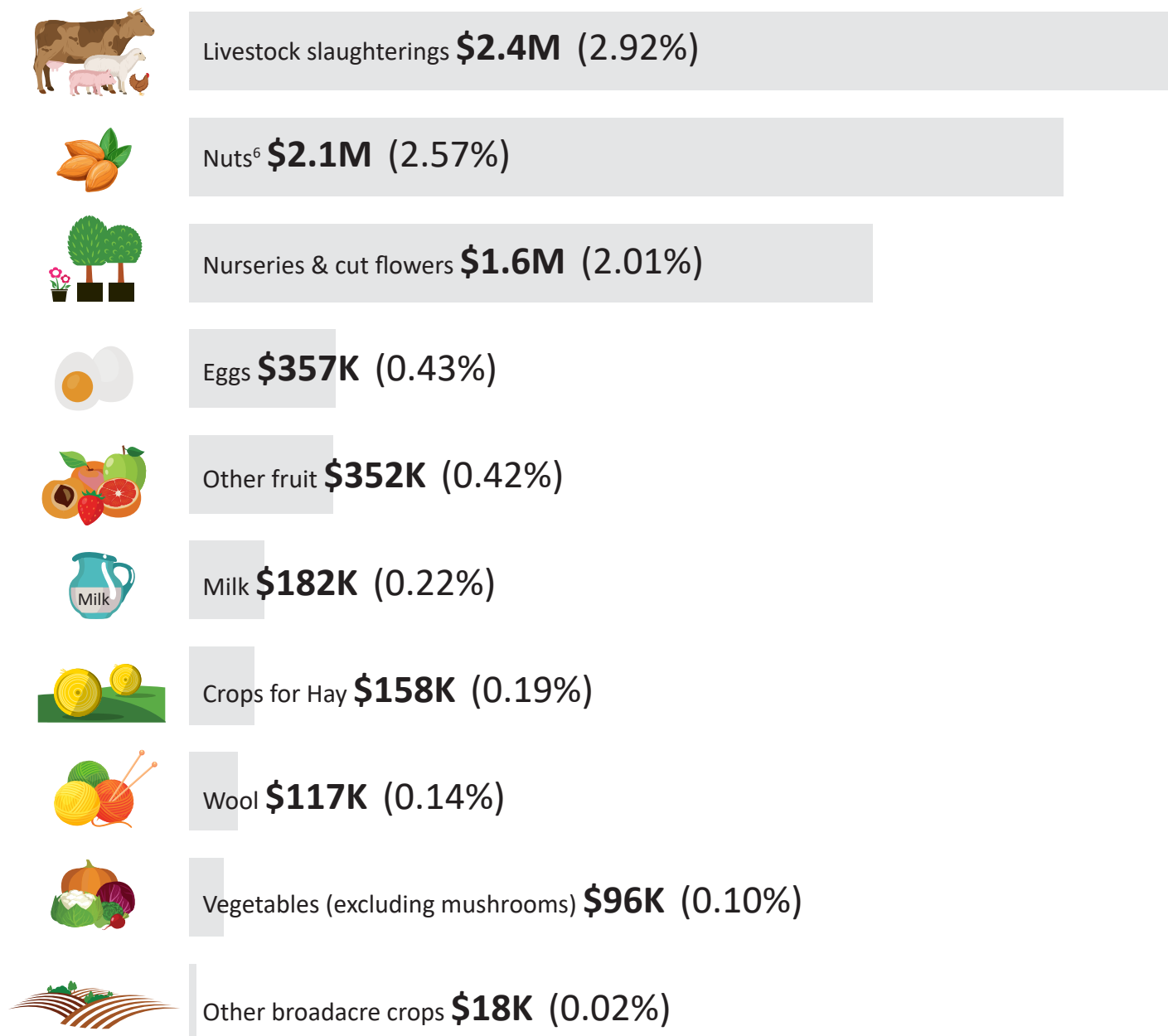
The number of people employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing industries has reduced steadily from 481 people in 1996 to 332 in 2011. However, the number increased in 2016 where 514 local residents were employed by the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries, of which 100 were Green Wedge residents (id, community profile, 2020).

There is a substantial food manufacturing and a growing food retailing sectors in the municipality that make up our local food industry. Food product manufacturing is the largest manufacturing sub-sector in the City of Whittlesea. In 2015/16, the sub-sector was worth \$860.5 million. Food Retailing is another growing sector with significant specialisation in our municipality, worth just over \$230 million (total output) in 2015/16. The growth is potentially linked to the contribution of local agricultural products in local markets. (Agribusiness Profile, CoW, 2018)

Council has been actively advocating to Federal government to advance the Melbourne Food Innovation and Export Hub (MFIH) - a 51-hectare site adjacent to the Melbourne Wholesale Market - and develop an international food hub in Melbourne's north. There is a significant opportunity to build upon the existing competitive advantage within the food industry and further support agriculture in the Green Wedge.



Fig 4. 2015-2016 Agricultural Production in CoW (excluding mushroom production)



(Source: id economic profile)

⁶ This is due to the existence of one large almond processor in our municipality.

Community Consultation Summary

In preparing the GWMP, over 100 community members and stakeholders directly participated in consultation activities via meetings, drop-in sessions, face to face / online information sessions, surveys etc. The conversations we had were built around the Whittlesea 2040's four goals; Connected Community, Liveable Neighbourhoods, Strong Local Economy, and Sustainable Environment. Main questions Council asked during the consultations included: what does the community value the most about the Whittlesea Green Wedge, what themes the community want to see included in the vision for the GWMP 2022-2032, and what opportunities exist to help achieve this vision.

The community consultation revealed, in summary:

What people value the most (Top 3) about our Green Wedge:

1. The positive effects on my wellbeing from enjoying green natural spaces
2. Environmental significance of the area - Just the existence of natural landscapes and features like hills, trees, waterways and animals
3. Environmental benefits (e.g. reduced pollution in the air and water, reduced heat or flood impact from extreme weather events)

When the community was asked about what should be included in the GWMP vision the following key themes emerged:

- Enhance and protect biodiversity
- Protect natural assets / resources
- Encourage and support innovative and sustainable land management practice
- Protect and enhance rural character and landscape
- Protect and promote the rich Aboriginal and post contact heritage within the Green Wedge
- Protect Green Wedge from urban encroachment
- Connect people to natural areas through the provision of walking trails and bicycle paths and other facilities
- Educate and provide support to residents and visitors in caring for and respecting the Green Wedge
- Support farming and food production
- More trees





Table 3 summarises top opportunities community members identified for achieving their vision for the Green Wedge. It is worth highlighting that the community identified they would like to have more say in shaping the future of the Green Wedge, that they would like to learn more about Green Wedge and, importantly, how to look after the Green Wedge.

IN THIS SECTION:

- Policy Context
- The Whittlesea Green Wedge
- Community & Economic Profile
- **Community Consultation Summary**



Table 3. Opportunities identified in Community Consultation

 <h2>Sustainable Environment</h2> <p>The City of Whittlesea has recently endorsed three strategies⁷ to protect a sustainable environment. Those strategies contain many detailed actions, relevant to the management of the Whittlesea Green Wedge, identified by previous community consultation.</p> <p>The GWMP consultation reaffirmed the following opportunities for creating a Sustainable Environment in the Whittlesea Green Wedge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve the management and protection of biodiversity ▪ Assist landowners, residents and environmental groups to deal with erosion, re-vegetation and weed control and improve the quality of the natural waterways ▪ Improve water management in the Green Wedge ▪ Partner with field experts to support and provide education in sustainable agriculture and land management practices, soil quality and ecology ▪ Protect and plant more trees in the n Wedge and grow the significant tree registry ▪ Work with the State Government to maintain the Urban Growth Boundary. 	 <h2>Liveable Neighbourhoods</h2> <p>Key opportunities identified for creating Liveable Neighbourhoods included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protect and enhance the rural landscape ▪ Discourage new residential development in areas prone to environmental hazards such as flood, erosion and bushfire ▪ Support good management and use of land close to the rural/urban fringe ▪ Provide better quality and fit-for-purpose roads ▪ Partner with other councils, government, and organisations who share a common interest in managing green wedge areas. 	 <h2>Strong Local Economy</h2> <p>Key Opportunities identified for creating a Strong Local Economy included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support local business owners in the agri-food industry that will bring more local jobs and help creating a healthier community ▪ Offer greater flexibility for producers in how they use their land to carry out diverse, value adding and innovative farming practices ▪ Increase opportunities for people to buy local produce, e.g. by promoting local producers, farm gate sales ▪ Explore opportunities for tourism in the rural areas; from agritourism to recreational activities ▪ Review Council incentives to better support agribusiness. 	 <h2>Connected Community</h2> <p>Key opportunities identified for creating a connected community included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understand and support the diverse needs of our rural community ▪ Listen to landowners and residents to benefit from local knowledge for better land management outcomes and improved understandings of local histories ▪ Greater focus on protection of places of indigenous significance, and incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into the management of the Green Wedge ▪ Upskill the community and provide education on important issues relating to the Green Wedge.
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⁷ The Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2019), Greening Whittlesea City Forest Strategy (2020-2040) and the Whittlesea Water for All Strategy (2020)

“ Quotes from our Community

‘Responsible interaction with the environment to avoid depletion or degradation of natural resources and allow for long-term environmental quality and increased community interactions, improved living standards and manageable growth’

‘Establishing appropriate uses/ development at the interface of the urban growth boundary. There will be a transition from urban to rural properties and therefore guidance on appropriate uses and development in those locations’

‘Do not allow re-zoning for housing development or farming development in Eden park- protect the remnant vegetation’ Protect the masons road metropolitan boundary’

‘Stop large unsustainable subdivisions’

‘Greater support for innovative land use for value maximisation. Reduced focus on livestock, more focus on high value sustainable crops. Continue support for local distribution and consumption.’

‘Work with innovative groups focused on sustainability in agriculture’

‘Raising awareness that a Green Wedge area serves an important role as the “lungs” of Melbourne and can only do this if there “Green” is protected through maintaining clean waterways and flora and fauna protection’

‘Protecting life is more important than allowing people to live in areas that will put them, their family and those tasked to go and save them from themselves during environmental hazards occurring.’

‘Involve community in the solutions, upskill community to gain knowledge that supports economic participation and employment pathways that not only maintain but also activate these spaces in a sustainable way’

‘Having a Green Wedge zone in such close proximity to Melbourne creates significant opportunity for the development of an ecotourism industry that would serve to support employment and raise awareness for the diverse flora and fauna that exists in the area’

‘Improving and protecting our waterways is paramount. Assistance programs for landowners to improve the quality of the natural waterways, assisting with erosion and re vegetation.’

‘It is imperative the metropolitan boundary is maintained, and the green wedge is protected. Connecting the community of Eden park with a bus service. Protecting vegetation and rejecting re zoning for development.’

‘I would prefer to create tourism and recreation than develop land as it has been done in the past’

‘Adding value to the area is essential to attract visitors and income. This relies on well planned and managed spaces that are attractive, integrate the natural environment with the human, and are easily accessible to the community.’

‘Green Wedge Education to the residents via different platform. Social media which is free to run and could reach out more people at a lower running cost should be considered.’

‘The broader, diverse Whittlesea community needs greater opportunities to connect, engage with and protect the truly green elements of their local area.’

‘Cultural heritage mapping to understand key Aboriginal values, Master planning of blue-green networks to build connectivity between the Green Wedge and neighbouring urban areas’

‘Give people the opportunity to reside here’



PART B:

Shaping the Future

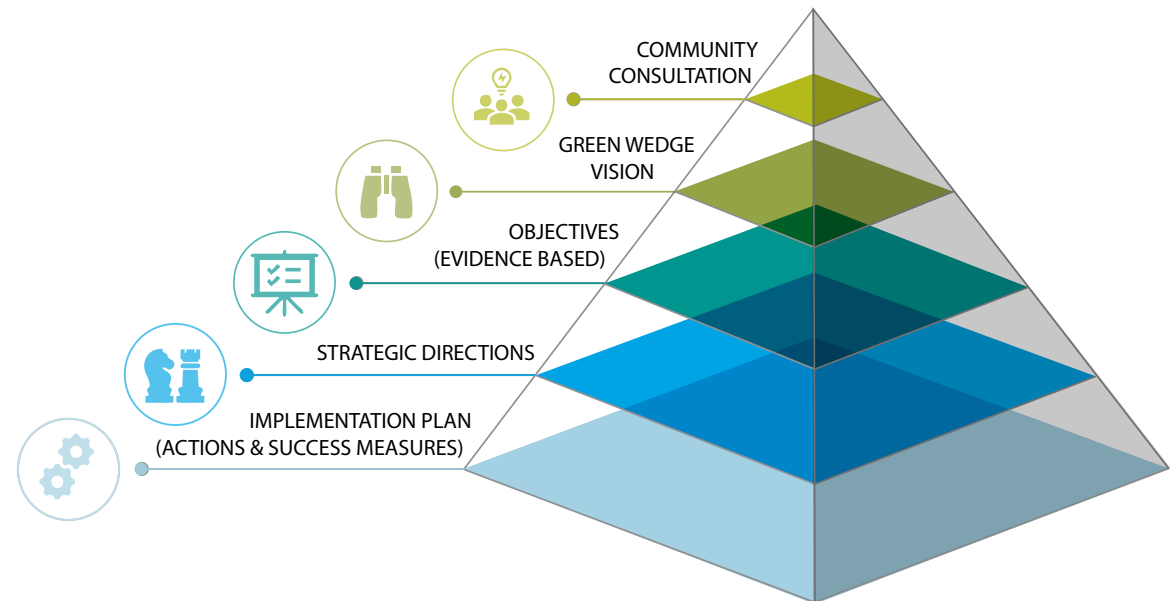
IN THIS SECTION:

- Vision & Objectives
- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 1: Sustainable Environment
 - Goal 2: Liveable Neighbourhoods
 - Goal 3: Strong Local Economy
 - Goal 4: Connected Community

Part B of the GWMP proposes an over-arching vision and objectives for the Whittlesea Green Wedge. It also includes discussions of key issues identified through the community consultation and from Council's background research. In response to those key issues, Strategic Directions are developed that will guide Council's journey to achieve the vision and objectives.

Together, the Green Wedge vision, objectives and Strategic Directions will inform the development of an Implementation Plan.

Fig 5. How does community consultation outcomes inform the GWMP?





Vision & Objectives

The following Green Wedge vision and objectives are informed by the outcomes of the community consultation process. The vision outlines the preferred future direction for the Whittlesea Green Wedge and the objectives further articulate what success should look like on the ground if the vision is to be achieved.

VISION

Our Green Wedge is part of a connected ecosystem where biodiversity, natural assets and resources are enhanced and protected from urban encroachment.

Our Green Wedge provides for rural land uses and development, and supports economic opportunities in sustainable agriculture and the visitor economy⁸ that respect the environmental significance, rural and landscape character of the Green Wedge.

Our Green Wedge protects and promotes its rich Aboriginal and post contact heritage.

Our Green Wedge connects and supports a diverse, resilient and respectful community who are empowered to take care of the land.

IN THIS SECTION:

- Vision & Objectives
- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 1: Sustainable Environment
 - Goal 2: Liveable Neighbourhoods
 - Goal 3: Strong Local Economy
 - Goal 4: Connected Community

⁸ Visitor economy here refers to tourism, recreation and hospitality industries.

Green Wedge Objectives

Sustainable Environment

Green Wedge Objectives

- Our Green Wedge's natural landscapes are valued, healthy and biodiverse.
- Our Green Wedge is sustainably managed and is resilient to climate change and natural disasters.
- Our Green Wedge waterways are healthy and clean.
- Our Green Wedge protects and enhances greening on both council and non-council land.

Strong Local Economy

Green Wedge Objectives

- The importance of agriculture in the Green Wedge is well understood by our community.
- Our Green Wedge supports activities that enhance agricultural and environmental values and discourages uses that are incompatible with the purposes of the Green Wedge.
- Local agribusinesses are supported to facilitate ongoing viability and are encouraged to apply sustainable and innovative practices.
- Our Green Wedge supports a visitor economy that is sustainable and sensitive to the environmental and social impacts. The natural and built assets are recognised in the destination promotion activities.
- Our Green Wedge supports renewable energy production, protects existing operation and future opportunities of extractive industry and regionally significant waste management assets that is compatible with Green Wedge values.

Liveable Neighbourhoods

Green Wedge Objectives

- High value landscape features and significant views⁹ are identified and protected in the Green Wedge.
- Communities understand the purpose of the Green Wedge zones and are supported to conduct appropriate land use, development and management on the land.
- Settlement in our Green Wedge is sensitive to the environment and is resilient to climate change and natural disasters.
- Our Green Wedge enjoys a safe and fit for purpose transport network that meets the needs and expectations of our community.
- Our Green Wedge has a clearly defined, permanent urban-rural interface that offer high ecological, recreational, agricultural values.

GREEN WEDGE VISION

Connected Community

Green Wedge Objectives

- Our Green Wedge community takes pride in their Green Wedge and are empowered with the knowledge and opportunities to look after it.
 - Our Green Wedge community enjoy better accessibility to open space facilities, safe and fit-for-purpose road and public transport infrastructure for greater social and economic resilience.
- Our Green Wedge enhances, protects and promotes places of cultural significance.
- Our Green Wedge community and Council, partner with Traditional Owners in various practices that Care for Country.

⁹ Such as the non-urban break between Masons Road and the Whittlesea Township along the Plenty Road corridor and the views to the Plenty Ranges, the Great Dividing Range and Quarry Hills.

Strategic Directions

This section proposes Strategic Directions that will guide Council's journey to achieve the Green Wedge vision and objectives. The section is structured to align with the Whittlesea 2040 goals.

The Strategic Directions derive from key issues, outlined below under each goal, facing the Whittlesea Green Wedge based on background review undertaken as part of this project. The Strategic Directions also respond to opportunities identified by community members via the public engagement process (see **Table 3**. Opportunities identified in Community Consultation – p30).

Together with the Green Wedge vision and objectives, the Strategic Directions will guide the development of a separate, detailed Green Wedge Management Plan Implementation Plan.

IN THIS SECTION:

③ Vision & Objectives

③ Strategic Directions

- Goal 1: Sustainable Environment
- Goal 2: Liveable Neighbourhoods
- Goal 3: Strong Local Economy
- Goal 4: Connected Community

Green Wedge Strategic Directions

Sustainable Environment

Strategic Directions

- 1.1 Improve the management and protection of biodiversity.
- 1.2 Partner with landowners and land managers to ensure water is managed in an integrated and effective manner in the Green Wedge.
- 1.3 Ensure our residents and our environment benefit from a diverse, colourful, and healthy City Forest that connects people to people, people to nature, and people to place.
- 1.4 Partner with landowners and other government agencies to improve soil health.

Strong Local Economy

Strategic Directions

- 3.1 Improve understanding of the value of agriculture in the Green Wedge to provide for appropriate use and development.
- 3.2 Support local agribusinesses and the visitor economy to grow, be sustainable and prepared for climate change.
- 3.3 Work with State Government to provide for future infrastructure and green energy needs.

Liveable Neighbourhoods

Strategic Directions

- 2.1 Protect non-urban breaks and enhance landscape amenity and rural character.
- 2.2 Discourage new settlement in areas prone to extreme natural hazards.
- 2.3 Provide a safe and fit for purpose local road network and support active travel
- 2.4 Protect Green Wedge from further urban encroachment and improve management of the urban and rural interface.
- 2.5 Direct urban uses towards designated Whittlesea township area and areas within the UGB.

Connected Community

Strategic Directions

- 4.1 Understand and support the diverse needs of our rural community for environmental, social and economic resilience.
- 4.2 Better connect the Green Wedge with our communities via communication, placemaking and programs.
- 4.3 Engage and empower community members on various aspects of caring for and managing the the Green Wedge.
- 4.4 Partner with Traditional Owners to support the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage, improve land and water management and other Caring for Country practices in the Green Wedge



GOAL 1

Sustainable Environment

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 1: Sustainable Environment
 - **Key Issues**
 - Strategic Directions

KEY ISSUES

The key issues facing the Whittlesea Green Wedge are identified based on a background review undertaken as part of this project and are consistent with findings from community consultation.

a. Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the number and variety of living things on the planet. There are many threats to Whittlesea's biodiversity, such as land use changes; habitat fragmentation; weeds, pest animals and pathogens; inappropriate land management; and climate change. It is important that Council continues to work with landowners, residents, land managers and Traditional Owners to improve the management and protection of biodiversity and natural landscapes across the municipality now and into the future.

b. Soil management

Managing soil health is an emerging issue of national significance (Commonwealth, 2021). In Whittlesea Green Wedge, high level soil mapping information indicates that the area is likely to contain sodic and dispersive soils that are prone to structural decline (Jacobs 2020). In addition, much of the northern area in our Green Wedge is hilly and susceptible to gully formation resulting from erosion. Any removal of vegetation and ground cover in these areas heightens the risk of gully formation and erosion, especially when the soils are sandy or sodic and prone to structural decline.

The significant environmental and economic impacts of erosion are often site-specific, yet their effects are wide ranging including but not limited to:

- Increased erosion potential
- A deterioration in water quality and degradation of aquatic flora and fauna habitat
- Failure of civil and private assets (i.e. roads, fences, dams and sheds) due to soil movement
- Diminishing areas of productive agricultural land
- Poor ability to establish vegetative growth leading to a failure to thrive for open spaces, gardens and street trees
- Decreased infiltration and holding capacity, and high runoff rates

Soil salinity has also been identified as a key biophysical threat to our Green Wedge with saline soils recorded across much of the Green Wedge. Saline soils can have a significant impact on biodiversity, farming, water quality and physical condition of rivers and streams. Salinity can also degrade soil structure and cause erosion. It is important that Council seek opportunities to work with all level of governments, including neighbouring Councils to understand and improve soil management across the Green Wedges.

Green Wedge areas are susceptible to illegal soil and fill dumping, particularly given their proximity to subdivision works within the growth areas making them attractive dumping locations. This is partly due to the absence of permit triggers within the planning scheme on land within the Green Wedge and Rural Conservation Zones, unless the works are of a specified nature impacting on saline ground water or changing the rate of flow across title boundaries, or where the land is subject to an overlay that requires a planning permit for earthworks. Erosion management exemptions also create ambiguity and when coupled with the absence of all encapsulating permit requirements for earthworks, Councils are unable to properly regulate the occurrence of land filling and any associated impacts on the environment and the amenity of the surrounding area.

Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Conservation

The Grassy Eucalypt Woodland (GEW) of the Victorian Volcanic Plan is a Nationally significant ecological community that is listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

In 2009, The Commonwealth Government, under the EPBC Act, approved the extension of Melbourne's urban growth boundary, subject to conditions aimed at ensuring that development occurs in a way that protects areas of environmental significance. This includes securing 1200ha of GEW Reserve in the Whittlesea green wedge.

The Whittlesea GEW investigation area is covered by an Environment Significant Overlay (ESO). However, to date no land within this reserve has been secured or acquisition processes commenced by the State.

Securing the GEW investigation area is important not only for the City of Whittlesea, but also adjoining Councils and the State of Victoria as a whole. It will:

- protect biodiversity assets and safeguard the landscape qualities for Whittlesea's green wedge
- manage the urban-rural interface by introducing a permanent and functional buffer to the urban growth areas

c. Water management

The Whittlesea Green Wedge contains the critical upper and middle catchments of various metropolitan waterways, including the Plenty River, the Merri Creek, Darebin Creek and a small portion of the Diamond Creek. It is also home to various wetlands and the important water supply catchment of Yan Yean Reservoir and the Toorourrong Reservoir that is linked by channels to the Yan Yean Reservoir. Groundwater held in aquifers also contributes to surface water supplies, interacting and contributing to the flow and health of waterways and wetlands.



Tunnel erosion in Whittlesea Green Wedge

Careful management of the upper and middle water catchment in the Whittlesea Green Wedge is crucial to the overall stream and waterway health. There are ongoing threats to the health of rural waterways. In the northern rural area of the Green Wedge, some waterways and their tributaries are flow starved due to the impact of human interventions in the catchment such as farm dams, licenced extractions and weirs and diversions for water supply.

This interwoven relationship between surface and groundwater resources, and how activities on the land affect water health, relies on integrated catchment management to tie together the range of considerations. Council need to continue work with rural landowners, including water agencies to improve the ecological condition of the waterways, tributaries, wetlands and the overall water resilience in our Green Wedge. It is important to note that Melbourne Water's Healthy Waterways Strategy for the Yarra River catchment identifies an extensive range of objectives for each waterway within the strategy, including Plenty River, Merri Creek and Darebin Creek. There is a strong alignment between Council and Melbourne Water for collaboration in better water management.

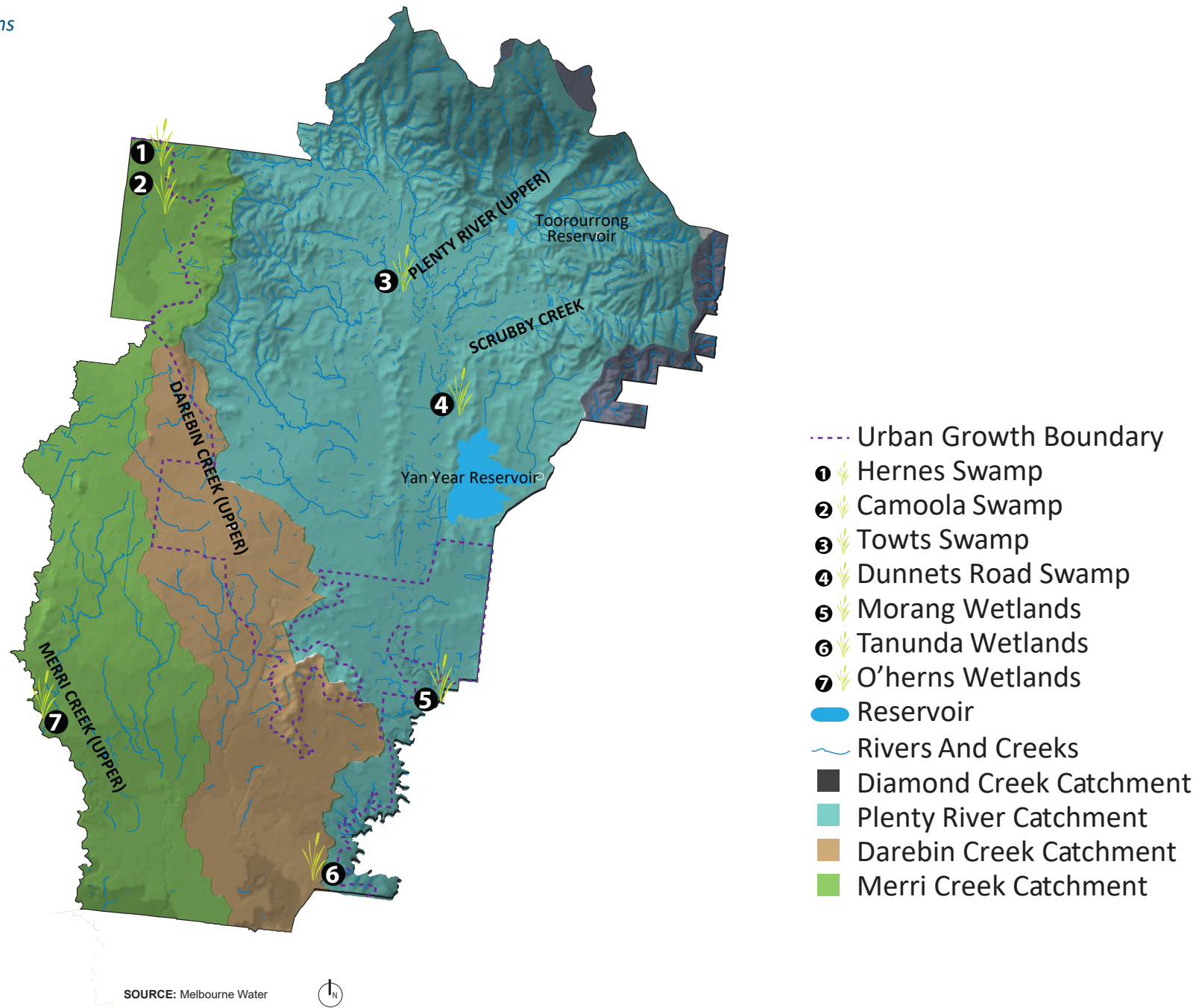
d. Climate change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the first instalment of their sixth assessment report on 9 August 2021, which states that every corner of the planet is already being affected and it could get far worse. Based on our current trajectory, global warming would likely increase to 1.5°C by about 2030 (IPCC, 2021).

In recent decades, the City of Whittlesea has become hotter and drier, a trend which is expected to continue. In comparison to 1986-2005, by the 2050s under a high emissions scenario, the climate future of the City of Whittlesea will experience:

- Rising temperatures (increase of maximum temperature up to 2.3°C)
- More frequent, intense, and longer heatwaves (double the number of heatwave days)
- Decline in rainfall (up to 14% less cool season rainfall)
- Harsher fire weather, longer fire season, and more fire danger days

Map 3. Water Systems



Climate change has the potential to adversely affect biodiversity and environmental health in general in Whittlesea through changes to the quality, extent and distribution of vegetation and habitat, changes to hydrology (the natural wetting and drying cycles and frequency and duration of inundation) of wetlands and watercourses, and changes in the diversity and abundance of wildlife reliant upon those habitats. Rainfall levels and temperature change will also affect access to water and impact rural production. Increased frequency of extreme weather events such as storms will impact farming through increased erosion, yield reduction and damage to crops, etc.

There is an increased awareness of the community's vulnerability to climate change. Recent flooding, bushfire events and heat waves have brought focus to the increasing impacts of climate change, changing the way land is managed, and future planning for the Green Wedge.

Alternative Water for Farmers

Water is increasingly becoming a limiting factor for agriculture in the Green Wedge. Council also see an opportunity in supporting farmers to build alternative water systems that are different to dams which can have detrimental impact on waterways health for multiple reasons.

Alternative water is water supplied by sustainable sources that can be used to help offset the use of fresh surface water and groundwater (such as lakes and aquifers). Alternative water sources include rainwater from your roof, storm water, treated wastewater or greywater. There is an opportunity in supporting farmers to build small alternative water systems that are different to dams. For instance, capturing rainfall runoff from shed and house rooves can be a reliable, efficient water source that is easily overlooked. On small properties around 8 hectares or less, it is generally more efficient to capture water from a shed roof than to create a dam that will leak, erode and evaporate a lot of water when it is mostly needed. Agriculture Victoria has provided an online '[farm dam calculator](#)' to demonstrate and compare differences.



Strategic Directions – Sustainable Environment

In response to key issues and opportunities identified by Council's background research and the community consultation (see **Table 3**. Opportunities identified in Community Consultation – p30), the Strategic Directions below will direct Council's endeavour toward achieving a 'Sustainable Environment' in the Green Wedge context:

SD 1.1 - Improve the management and protection of biodiversity

Implementation of *The City of Whittlesea Biodiversity Strategy (2019-2029)* seeks to improve the management and protection of biodiversity across the Municipality now and into the future. The Biodiversity Strategy builds on the many efforts already underway by individuals, community groups, and government and aims to develop a coordinated approach that will allow for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

SD 1.2 - Partner with landowners and land managers to ensure water is managed in an integrated and effective manner in the Green Wedge

Whittlesea Water for All articulates the City of Whittlesea's vision, desired outcomes and recommended actions for water management within the Municipality. The outcomes of this strategy aim to keep our waterways clean and our priority green spaces irrigated. It aims to improve Council and the community's preparedness for floods and droughts, and water efficiency. Within the Green Wedge area, the strategy proposed to '*Support local agriculture and improve water management*'.

Melbourne Water is the regional drainage and floodplain manager and the waterway manager for the Port Phillip and Westernport region. There is a strong alignment between Council's Green Wedge Management Plan and the Melbourne Water's Healthy Waterways Strategy in the area of water management.

SD 1.3 - Ensure our residents and our environment benefit from a diverse, colourful, and healthy City Forest that connects people to people, people to nature, and people to place

An integral part of our environment, trees also have a big role to play both in connecting communities within liveable neighbourhoods, and in our response to changing climate conditions: Trees on public and private land are important green infrastructure providing a range of benefits including improved mental and physical wellbeing, reduced heating and cooling costs, increased property values. They also reduce air pollution, store carbon, slow and filter storm water run-off, and provide habitat for wildlife.

The Greening Whittlesea City Forest Strategy (2021-2040) set up a vision that 'our residents and our environment benefit from a diverse, colourful, and healthy City Forest that connect people to people, people to nature, and people to place.'

SD 1.4 - Partner with landowners and other government agencies to improve soil health

Healthy and stable soil is the foundation of sustainable environment and managing soil health is an emerging issue of national significance. The City of Whittlesea has long recognised the environmental importance of soil conservation and has been actively working with landowners to enhance soil quality via a framework of sustainable land management. It is crucial that Council continue to partner with landowners, community groups, and various levels of government to manage risk and improve overall soil health.

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 1: Sustainable Environment
 - Key Issues
 - **Strategic Directions**



GOAL 2

Liveable Neighbourhoods

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 2: Liveable Neighbourhoods
 - **Key Issues**
 - Strategic Directions

KEY ISSUES

The key issues facing the Whittlesea Green Wedge are identified based on background review undertaken as part of this project and are consistent with findings from community consultation.

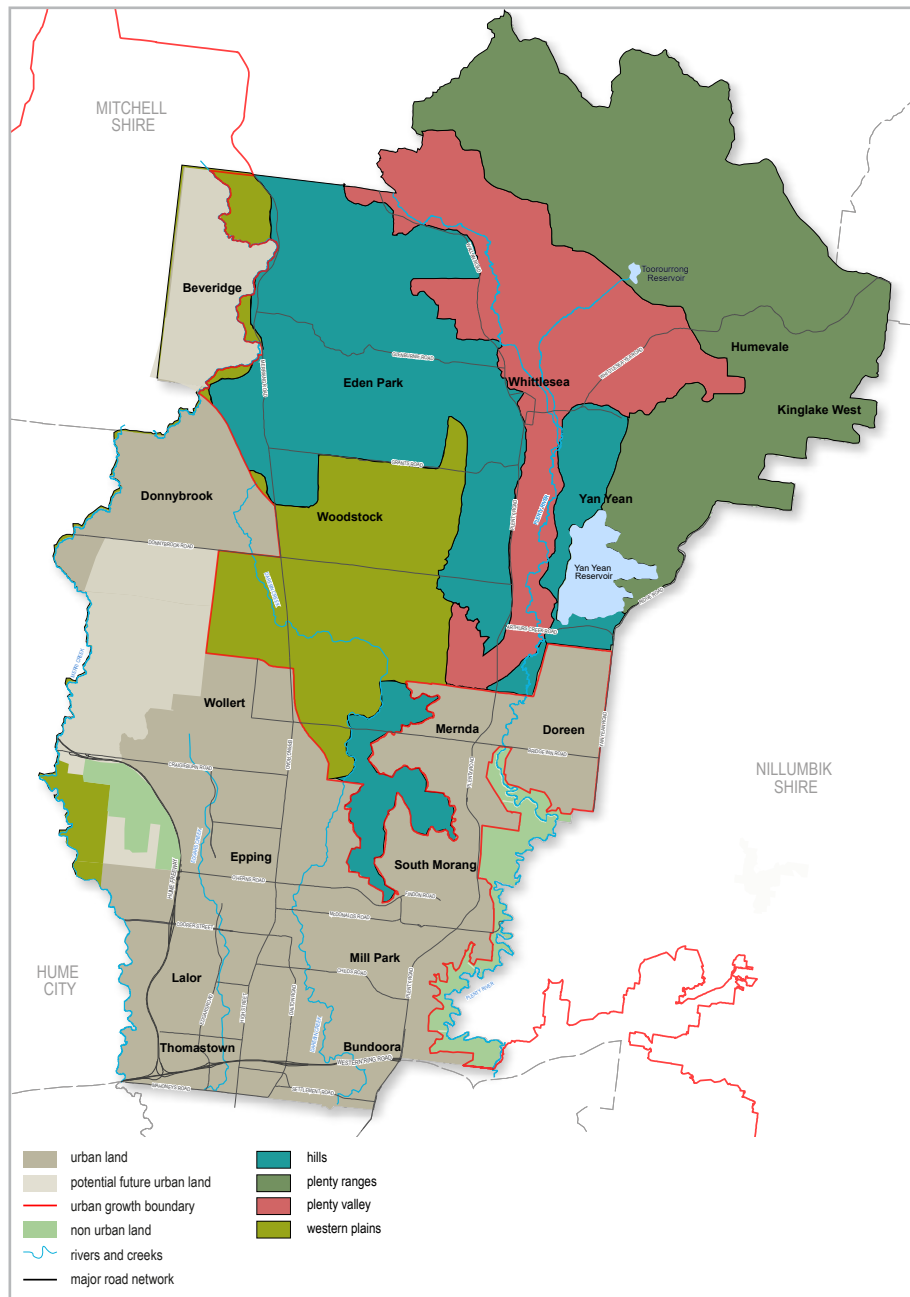
a. Landscape Amenity and Rural character

There are four main land character areas in our Green Wedge: The Plenty Valley; The Plenty Ranges; The Hills and Western Plains. Each of these landscape character areas contain specific areas of visual significances, natural features and examples of the City's cultural heritage which all contribute to the establishment of the identity of the City of Whittlesea. In addition, there are key green breaks identified as having particular importance to maintaining the Green Wedge. For instance, the green urban break between Mernda and Whittlesea Township.

Community consultation indicated that in the Whittlesea Green Wedge, a high value is placed on the quality of the rural landscape and landscape amenity which provide valuable environmental, social and economic benefits for residents and visitors alike through its contribution to liveability, sense of place, and delivering quality tourism/recreation experiences.

Local policies in the Whittlesea Planning Scheme already includes strategies to protect landscape amenity and rural land character in the Green Wedge. Yet, further work is required in better supporting Council officers at the policy implementation and enforcement stage to ensure the built form and location of development in the Green Wedge contributes to diverse environments and sense of place.

Map 4. Rural Land Character



In particular, further guidance is required to ensure that the development of sheds/outbuildings in Green Wedge is compatible with the purpose of the zone and respond appropriately to their context. Planning data for the past decade indicates that over half of the statutory planning applications are for sheds/outbuildings. A number of issues have been identified in respect to some of these proposals, including:

- The intensity of the building size and associated uses - some of those sheds are built at a scale larger than those on industrial blocks in designated industrial areas and have multiple cars and trucks entering and leaving sites via dirt roads that were not designed for heavy use.
- Inappropriate location - some are proposed to be built on structurally unstable sodic soils which create environmental issues such as tunnel erosion.

b. Rural living and natural hazards

Rural living or rural residential development refers to the occupation of rural land primarily for lifestyle residential purposes rather than for farming¹⁰. Across metropolitan Melbourne, there is high demand for rural living and the desire to use Green Wedges and agricultural land for a range of urban activities. The State Government clearly articulates the following desired planning outcomes to address rural living and natural hazards in Plan Melbourne 2017-2050:

- Manage rural living to prevent negative impacts on agriculture, biodiversity and landscape values.
- Avoid development in areas that are subject to high risk from bushfire or flooding and inundation so as to minimise potential risk to life, property and the environment.

In our Green Wedge, there are several pockets of rural living areas due to historic subdivision. Some of these existing rural living settlements are located in areas subject to environmental risks and hazards such as bushfire, erosion and flooding which can present a risk to the community and the land itself. For example, Eden Park has sodic soils and as a result tunnel erosion is widespread in the area which constrains its ability to accommodate further growth.

¹⁰ 'Rural residential development' refers to land in a rural setting, used and developed for dwellings that are not primarily associated with agriculture. Some agriculture may take place on the land however it will be ancillary to the use for a dwelling. It is likely to be carried on for 'lifestyle' reasons and is unlikely to provide a significant source of household income. Planning Practice Note 37 Rural Residential Development, DELWP, 2015

To reduce the environmental impacts of development and enhance the amenity of the area, a Restructure Overlay (RO) was introduced into Clause 45.05 of the Whittlesea Planning Scheme in the 1980's to address old and inappropriate subdivisions. The RO seeks to restructure the lots in order to manage the environmental impacts of development and enhance the amenity of the identified area. Primarily, the RO seeks to reduce the large number of small lots in Eden Park, although it also includes small pockets in Humevale and Whittlesea with lot sizes range from 4000sqm to 8000sqm. The RO seeks to ensure lots are capable of supporting rural living and on-site effluent disposal. A permit to construct or extend a dwelling or other building in the RO may be granted for all or part of land in a restructure lot area only when the lot is restructured.

The Restructure Plan continues to be the subject of many enquiries to Council by landowners and prospective purchasers. To date there have been multiple Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) decisions which have supported Council's approach to the RO.

Moving forward, the RO remains a valid tool to manage rural living in areas that are subject to high risk from bushfire, erosion and other environmental challenges discussed in previous section.

Whilst the RO is to be retained, there is an opportunity for Council to work with the landowners affected by the RO to increase understanding of the purpose of the RO, explore ways to facilitate the restructure of lots and identify ways to mitigate the environmental risks through sustainable land management practices and appropriate land uses.

c. Transport and accessibility

Poor quality and congested roads, limited cycling and shared trail networks and lack of good public transport are the major transport and accessibility issues identified during the community engagement process.

The above issues can have serious impact on rural community's health, wellbeing and overall resilience that derives from access to jobs, markets, social networks, key community facilities and amenities within and outside of the Green Wedge. In addition, better transport and accessibility in general mean that the broader communities live outside the Green Wedge would have greater opportunities to visit, enjoy and protect the Green Wedge.

Above all, the provision of safe and fit-for-purpose road network is crucial not only for social and economic reasons but also in emergency management for bushfires, flood, etc. Within the Green Wedge, roads vary in degree of development from unpaved rural tracks to arterial roads. Roads and associated infrastructure must be developed in such a way that it restricts nonessential vehicle movements, keeps speeds low, provide for horse riding and maintain the rural character of the area. Routine management of roadsides must also continuously strike a balance between safety and environmental considerations.

d. Interface management

The Whittlesea Green Wedge has a 93km interface to land used or reserved for different urban uses and which is largely defined by the application of the UGB. There is ongoing pressure to permit more urban uses to locate in the Green Wedge, which may be inconsistent with the overarching purposes of the zoning. Similarly, the rural/urban interface needs to be carefully managed to ensure that urban development does not have an adverse impact on nearby rural activities.

The interface between the Whittlesea Green Wedge and the diverse urban land uses presents complex issues that require careful management. The Whittlesea Green Wedge interface is located along the following boundaries:

Northern Growth Area, Beveridge

An approximate 15km stretch of the Upper Merri Creek forms the northern UGB. The northern portion of this Whittlesea urban growth area is set aside for the development of the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal. Land between the Merri Creek and Merriang Road will need to be carefully managed for its environmental, landscape and productive values.

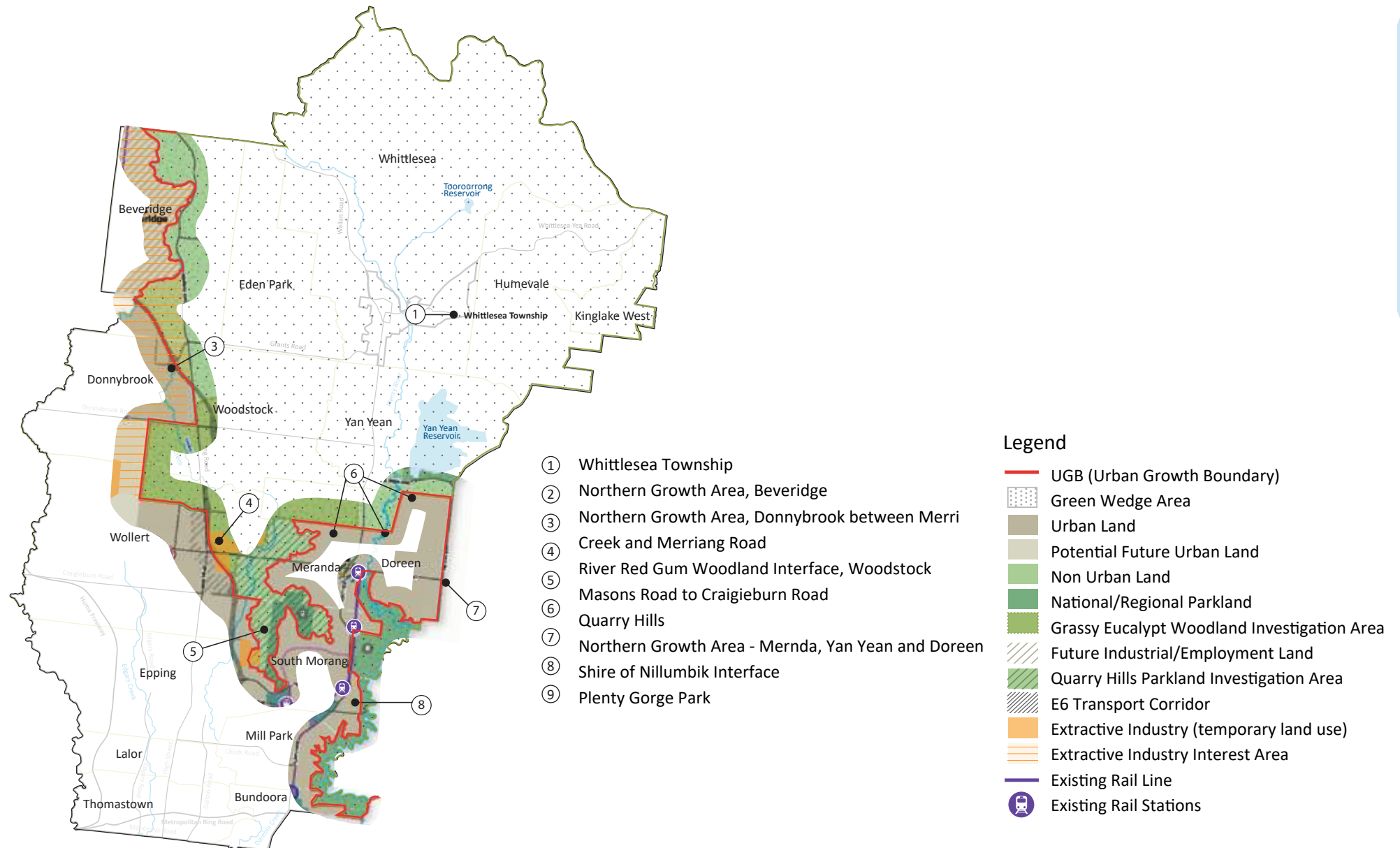
Northern Growth Area, Donnybrook Between Merri Creek and Merriang Road

4km of the UGB is defined by the proposed E6 freeway reservation. The undulating land between the E6 and Merriang Road will need to be carefully managed for its landscape and productive values.

River Red Gum Woodland Interface, Woodstock

The UGB provides a 9km interface to the significant River Red Gum Woodlands in Donnybrook. The land between the UGB, Epping Road and the E6 Freeway reservation, will need to be carefully managed for its conservation, productive and landscape values. This land forms part of an investigation area for the establishment of a River Red Gum Grassy Woodland reserve.

Map 5. Green Wedge Interface



Masons Road to Craigieburn Road

Between Masons Road and Craigieburn Road the UGB is defined by the E6 Freeway reservation for approximately 4km. Existing and proposed quarries and land fill operations are located within the Green Wedge adjacent to this boundary.

Quarry Hills

The Quarry Hills comprise a significant elevated landscape which adjoins three urban growth areas: Mernda, Doreen, South Morang and Epping North.

The UGB forms a 25k boundary to the Quarry Hills. To manage land use pressures and the urban interface surrounding the Quarry Hills, Council has sought to create an enduring boundary to protect the natural quality, topography and amenity of the Quarry Hills. Council has initiated a long-term proposal to bring approximately 1,000ha of this land into public ownership as part of the Quarry Hills Regional Parkland. In addition to conservation management and landscape protection the parkland links the three surrounding growth areas. Land outside the UGB that is identified as being within the Quarry Hills Regional Parkland area will need to be managed for its landscape, productive and conservation values under private ownership until such time as the land is transferred and managed for public purposes.

Northern Growth Area – Mernda, Yan Yean and Doreen

Approximately 7.5km of the UGB defines the northern boundary of the Plenty Valley growth area defined by Masons Road, Hazel Glen Drive, Watts Road, the new housing estates (Mernda Villages, Katandra Rise, Laurimar etc.) and the Melbourne Water pipe track reservation and title boundaries. Reducing land use conflict is the key issue along this interface.

Shire of Nillumbik Interface

Yan Yean Road and the housing estates to the west (Laurimar Park, Mitchell's Run, Cornell's Hill etc.) forms a 49.8km UGB interface between urban growth areas in the City of Whittlesea and Green Wedges areas in the Shire of Nillumbik. Yan Yean Road is proposed to function as an arterial road under the management of VicRoads and is designated as a permanent UGB.

Plenty Gorge Park

Approximately 25km of the UGB defines the Plenty Gorge Park. There is a need to ensure that this boundary is managed for its conservation values but also recognise the high fire risk that this interface presents to existing and proposed development.

Whittlesea Township

Whittlesea Township does not have the benefit of a UGB. Council recently endorsed the Whittlesea Township Plan - a twenty-year plan that will be used to guide and manage future planning and decision making for the township. The document establishes a long-term vision for the Whittlesea Township and seeks to protect the significant attributes of the township that contribute to its distinctive semi-rural character whilst building upon its opportunities. A continuing commitment to maintaining the non-urban break between the Township and Mernda, Doreen to the south, protecting the Whittlesea Hills to the west, visually significant landscapes and catchment areas to the east and floodplains to the north and south will limit future development but ensure that the Whittlesea Township retains its unique rural character. Council will continue to work with the State Government to ensure that the rural urban interface is appropriately managed in order to minimise the impact of urban activities on rural activities in the Green Wedge.

e. Land Speculation

There is also an increasing trend of speculators, in the hope of future rezoning, buying up large parcels of land close to the UGB at a cost that would place land purchases out of reach of many, especially those who may be looking to commence farming in the region. Similarly, there has been continuing pressure for rezoning to support more residential development around the periphery of the Whittlesea Township.

Council's property data indicates that the increase of land value in our Green Wedge has grown considerably over the past 5 years. The median property price is now over \$1 million (per property) compared to \$ 680k (per property) in 2015. The data also indicates that the rate of value increase was greater for smaller land parcels, a trend observed more broadly in other peri-urban areas (Parson 2017). This suggests those smaller blocks are being purchased for lifestyle and aesthetic value rather than agricultural value.

Land speculation has also contributed to land banking which leads to environmental degradation as there is less incentive for owners and occupiers to manage weeds, improve soils or to increase biodiversity values on those properties.

Strategic Directions – Liveable Neighbourhoods

In response to key issues and opportunities identified by Council's background research and the community consultation (see **Table 3**. Opportunities identified in Community Consultation – p30), the Strategic Directions below will direct Council's endeavour toward achieving 'Liveable Neighbourhoods' in the Green Wedge context:

SD 2.1 - Protect non-urban breaks and enhance landscape amenity and rural character

There is need to strengthen the planning controls as they relate to landscape amenity, rural character and to preserve the non-urban breaks for conservation, cultural and recreational purposes. Regard must be given to the visual characteristics of the landscape and the ability to sustain change without compromising visual integrity of the landscape character. The type of development and land use occurring in the rural areas of the municipality should respect the visual sensitivity of the landscape. In this context, visual sensitivity refers to the ability of a particular landscape to accommodate change. Rural character should be expressed in the siting, design, built form and landscape treatments of all development in the Whittlesea Green Wedge.

SD 2.2 - Discourage new settlement in areas prone to extreme natural hazards

In the context of climate change and increasing temperatures where it is anticipated that the impacts resulting from natural hazards and extreme events might be more severe and unpredictable, it is important that we support

community in Green Wedge. There is an opportunity to work with local community to ensure that they are more resilient to environmental changes. Further subdivision in locations that are identified as being highly susceptible natural hazards such as fire and flood should also be avoided.

SD 2.3 - Provide safe and fit for purpose local road network and support active travel modes

Council's Road Management Plan, together with the Asset Management Strategy, guide Council's endeavour in providing safe and efficient local road network that is sensitive to the environment and meets the needs and expectations of our community. In relation to public transport and shared trails, Council will continue to advocate strongly for improved public transport, including growing the range of community bus services. It would be important to work with other council and agencies to coordinate for better integration and connection between the Strategic Cycling Corridors (SCC) network and the local cycling network to support active travel modes.

SD 2.4 - Protect Green Wedge from further urban encroachment and improve management of the urban and rural interface

While the interface needs to be managed from both sides, it is important that the agent of change, primarily the new urban areas inside the UGB that are being established closer to existing rural areas, are designed to minimise potential conflicts. To this end, it is important for Council to work with State Government to safeguard the UGB, support landowners in sustainable land management and, where possible, create public green space and conservation areas as permanent and enduring buffers on the urban side of the UGB.

SD 2.5 - Direct urban uses towards designated Whittlesea township area and areas within the Urban Growth Boundary

Implement the Whittlesea Township Plan to limit intrusion into the Green Wedge, protect desired township character and further support the township's role in being the social and economic centre of rural communities in the municipality. This involves directing the provision of aged care, diverse and affordable housing, as well as other key community infrastructure into the defined township area and/or areas within the UGB.

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 2: Liveable Neighbourhoods
 - Key Issues
 - Strategic Directions

GOAL 3

Strong Local Economy

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 3: Strong Local Economy
 - Key Issues
 - Strategic Directions

KEY ISSUES

The key issues facing the Whittlesea Green Wedge are identified based on background review undertaken as part of this project and are consistent with findings from community consultation.

a. Agriculture in the Green Wedge

As the city expands, land previously reserved for agriculture has been brought into the UGB and converted into housing and related urban uses. In a global economic system, food and other agricultural production sourced nationally and internationally has substituted for lost local production. During Covid-19, disruption to employment and food supplies has further highlighted the vulnerabilities of the global and national market system.

Agriculture in the Whittlesea Green Wedge has the potential for creating more local employment opportunities and enhancing long-term food security. On one hand, there are existing and emerging opportunities for agriculture in our municipality, including:

- Proximity to growing urban markets
- Location of the Melbourne Wholesale Market in Epping
- Access to key transport infrastructure, including the Hume Freeway, Melbourne Airport and the future Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal (BIFT)
- More innovative and flexible planning controls via the State Government GWAL process
- Potential for access to other alternative water sources

On the other hand, agriculture in the Green Wedge is facing multiple social, economic and ecological challenges.

The demographic and lifestyle of Green Wedge residents is changing due to a lack of farm succession planning. Also, within the broader community, there is a limited understanding of local agricultural history, existing farming practices and the importance of preserving agriculture in Green Wedge areas. This often leads to competing land uses, incremental land fragmentation and rising land values.

It is difficult for new farmers to gain access to the land for agriculture purposes, not to mention the huge capital costs for those new entrants buying into the sector.

For existing operations, it is becoming increasingly difficult for farmers to stay financially viable. 'On farm' costs such as rates, water, labour is rising as well as market pressure from pricing competition as a result of the increasing dominance of a larger, more intensive farming industry. In addition, farmers in the Green Wedge and other peri-urban area often find themselves receiving unequal treatment as opposed to their regional counterparts (e.g. restricted funding opportunities, lack of support from industry bodies and huge capital costs for new farmers buying into the sector due to higher land cost).

Agriculture in the Green Wedge is facing threat from land degradation, natural hazards such as drought and flood, and climate change in general.

b. Land Fragmentation in the Green Wedge

Across the Whittlesea Green Wedge area there are approximately 1,500 properties (excluding Whittlesea Township), with a median size of 6.15ha and an average size of 18.15ha. Most of the private land holdings are in Green Wedge A Zone (GWAZ), Green Wedge Zone (GWZ) and Rural Conversation Zone 1 (RCZ1).

In the GWAZ where the minimum subdivision size of the GWAZ that is 8ha, the actual median lot size is 8ha with an average size of 10ha, which is generally consistent with the minimum subdivision size.

In the GWAZ while the minimum subdivision size is 8ha, the actual median lot size is 8ha with an average lot size of 10ha. This is generally consistent with the minimum subdivision size.

In the RCZ1, over 80% of properties are also under 40ha - the minimum subdivision lot size. The median lot size in RCZ1 is 8.11ha and the average size 18.94ha. The level of fragmentation is concerning given the conservation and

biodiversity focus of this zone. Note again that 18% of those RCZ1 properties are in Eden Park.

Whilst it is true that smaller land sizes can still be productive, land fragmentation is a barrier to efficiency and productivity when farmers have to undertake agricultural production across multiple, non-contiguous properties. In the Whittlesea Green Wedge, especially those areas already fragmented with a high concentration of smaller lots, it is crucial for Council to work with State Government to safeguard the minimum lot size and discourage any further subdivision of the remaining large properties. This is essential in order to retain and future proof existing and future agricultural opportunities in the area.

c. Visitor economy (tourism/recreation/ hospitality)

The Whittlesea Green Wedge contains recreation and tourism opportunities such as the Country Music Festival, the Whittlesea Agricultural Show, the Growling Frog and Whittlesea Golf Courses, the Yan Yean and Toorourrong reservoirs and a network of parks including the Quarry Hills park with exciting further development brought forward by a new Master Plan.

There are opportunities for creating a thriving visitor economy that maintains the integrity of the natural environment, provides social benefits for our local community and contributes to our local economy.

The visitor economy opportunities might include agri-tourism, eco-tourism, recreation and hospitality that is attached to natural and rural landscapes, heritage, food and wine experiences, and sustainable farming practices in our Green Wedge. The State Government's Draft Northern Metro Land Use Framework Plan (DELWP, 2021) recognise that the Northern Metro Green Wedges including the Whittlesea Green Wedge provide opportunities for local and international tourism in close proximity to Melbourne. It proposes a State level Strategy – 'Support sustainable tourism and recreation opportunities that complement key green wedge values and land uses including biodiversity, open space and trail networks, cultural heritage, agriculture, and scenic rural landscapes'. It is important that Council work with our Green Wedge community to identify prioritised opportunities that speak to our local history and our Green Wedge values. A new Destination Tourism Plan will be prepared in 2022-2032 by the City of Whittlesea which will seek to further advance visitor economy opportunities in the green wedge.

d. Extractive resources

Victoria is growing and demand for extractive resources such as sand, clay, gravel and stone are expected to more than double the 2015 levels by 2050 (DEDJTR 2018). To ensure materials are affordable and accessible now and into the future for affordable housing and infrastructure, it is essential that high quality resources in proximity to markets remain available for extraction. Plan Melbourne and Clause 14.03 1S (Planning Policy Framework) recognise the importance of protecting and carefully planning for these vital resources. The Victorian Government's 'Helping Victoria Grow: Extractive Resources Strategy' (2018) and the Draft Northern Metro Land Use Framework Plan (DELWP, 2021) has also identified the need to refresh Extractive Industry Interest Areas.

Extractive industry plays a significant role in our municipality in terms of both supply and demand. The City of Whittlesea ranks 7th among Top Twenty Critical Supply LGAs in the State (PWC, 2016, p.44). In 2019/2020, approximately 6.3% of the State's extractives was produced in the CoW, worth approximately \$61 million in sales. More than half of Victoria's clay was produced in Whittlesea in the same period. (DJPR, 2021) Being one of the fastest growing municipalities, Whittlesea is also considered one of the highest LGA for extractive resource demand.

There are two operating Work Authorities areas for Extractive Industries (i.e. quarries) located in the Whittlesea Green Wedge. Along the Northern Growth Area interface in Donnybrook and Beveridge (areas between Merri Creek and Merriang Road), there is also an Extractive Industry Interest Area identified by the State Government (refer to **Map 5**. Green Wedge Interface). Whilst our communities have diverse opinion about accommodating extractive industry especially future opportunities in the Green Wedge, it is important to note that provision of extractive resources is one of the purposes of Green Wedges. Council will work with the extractive industry and State Government to ensure appropriate buffer management during the operating life and rehabilitation at the end of the temporary use in a way that are suitable to the surrounding landscape character, environment and cultural values, thereby providing a net community benefit. This includes encouraging innovative end land uses that provide for improved community amenity outcomes.

e. Waste and Resource Recovery in a circular economy

There have been numerous challenges with waste management and recycling in Victoria. Population growth and increased consumption have put pressure on our resource recovery system. At local level, the City of Whittlesea has recently endorsed a Rethinking Waste Plan 2021-2030 to help businesses and communities transition to a circular economy where environmental impacts of production and consumptions can be reduced while still enable economic growth through waste avoidance, resource recovery, environmental protection and more productive use of natural resources.

One of the purposes of the Green Wedges is to support provision of waste and resource recovery uses in the circular economy. The Wollert landfill site in the Whittlesea Green Wedge is identified as a State significant Waste and Resource Recovery Hub serving the metropolitan and neighbouring regions. It is well located on the urban fringe and close to major transport routes. The State Government's Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Implementation Plan 2018 identified potential for the hub to expand resource recovery activities to meet the needs of the surrounding growth areas including establishing a resource recovery centre and pre-sort. It is important that adequate buffers and planning controls are provided around this site to protect the amenity of surrounding communities and prevent establishing incompatible uses that could impact on the functionality of the site over the long term. (Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group, 2016, Waste and Resource Recovery - the Metropolitan Implementation Plan).

Strategic Directions – Stronger Local Economy

In response to key issues and opportunities identified by Council's background research and the community consultation (see **Table 3**. Opportunities identified in Community Consultation – p30), the Strategic Directions below will direct Council's endeavour toward achieving 'Stronger Local Economy' in the Green Wedge context:

SD 3.1 - Improve understanding of the value of agriculture in the Green Wedge to provide for appropriate use and development

Agriculture in the Green Wedge is under threat from pressure to convert land to other uses including housing and smaller non-agricultural uses, leading to land use compatibility issues. Council need to raise the profile of agriculture in the Green Wedge and continue work with the State Government to communicate the purpose of the Green Wedge and the importance of protecting land for existing and future agriculture opportunities.

SD 3.2 - Support local agribusinesses and the visitor economy to grow, be sustainable and prepared for climate change

Council will work with farmers, business sector, institutions, other Green Wedge Councils and government agencies to support sustainable agribusiness and visitor economy via knowledge sharing, incentive, partnership, advocacy and policy direction.

SD 3.3 - Work with State Government to provide for future infrastructure and green energy needs

The State Government has identified the Northern Metro Region's Green Wedges as providing an important infrastructure function for Melbourne that includes waste management facilities and resource extraction, energy production and storage. Council will continue to work with State Government to protect existing and future opportunities, and balance those important functions with other Green Wedge priorities.

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 3: Strong Local Economy
 - Key Issues
 - **Strategic Directions**



GOAL 4

Connected Community

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 4: Connected Community
 - Key Issues
 - Strategic Directions

KEY ISSUES

The key issues facing the Whittlesea Green Wedge are identified based on background review undertaken as part of this project and are consistent with findings from community consultation.

a. Community knowledge and diverse perceptions

The broader Green Wedge community is diverse in terms of age, needs and cultural background. It consists of not only people who live/work in the Green Wedges, but also those who connect with our Green Wedge via regular visits, cultural and spiritual connection. Naturally, the community's knowledge of the Green Wedge varies, as does the community's level of commitment to different Green Wedge values.

There are still many community members with a limited understanding of the Green Wedge. There is an opportunity for further awareness building on – the purpose of the Green Wedge, why it is important, and the important role our Green Wedge community play in caring for our Green Wedge.

In addition, the review of the GWMP has revealed the diverse and sometimes conflicting perceptions of our community on the value and use of the Whittlesea Green Wedge: on one hand, the majority of the people who participated in the recent community consultation valued the natural environment and requested stronger protection of the Green Wedge from urban development, whilst there are also community members who put more value on rural living and expect similar levels of services and facilities in the Green Wedges to those in the urban areas.

b. Culture Heritage

Cultural heritage is an integral part of the Whittlesea Green Wedge. It contains sites of Aboriginal cultural significance and also sites of significance related to early European settlement.

Caring for Country is a term used to describe the relationship between Traditional Owners and their country. Caring for Country is more than the physical management of the land, water, plants and animals, but also encompasses looking after all of the values, places, resources, stories, and cultural obligations associated with the area, as well as associated processes of spiritual renewal, connecting with ancestors, food provision and maintaining kin relations (AIATSIS 2011).

The Wurundjeri Willum clan is the Traditional Owner of the majority of the land in the Whittlesea Green Wedge. The Wurundjeri Willum clan is part of the Wurundjeri trib and Woi Wurrung language group: one of the many language groups that make up the Kulin Nation.

Taungurung Land & Waters Council (TLaWC) is the Registered Aboriginal Party for several discontinuous sections of land along the north eastern boundary of the municipality where watercourse drainage system are to the north from the heights of the Great Dividing Range.

The Whittlesea landscape contains places and artefacts that are important to Traditional Owners because of associations with events, communities and individuals. All Aboriginal cultural heritage places and artifacts are protected by State legislation. Sites may include artefact scatters, scarred trees, trails and pathways along elevated areas, stone quarries, burials and rock wells

It is important to note that all Victorian Traditional Owners have recently developed the Cultural Landscapes Strategy 2022, setting a framework and pathways to lead the planning and management of Country in line with their cultural obligations to Care for Country. The Victorian Government is committed to working in partnership with Traditional Owners and have committed to a process of reforming the system and process that create barriers to the self determination of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians.

The history of European settlement of the City of Whittlesea mirrors closely the development of Victoria as a whole. Agricultural and pastoral activities dominated the early development of the region. Milling, timber and dairying

were the main economic drivers and the abundant reserves of local rock were used extensively for construction in the area. The construction of the Yan Yean Reservoir, the gold rush and railway construction were major events that contributed to the settlement patterns and growth within the region. Places of heritage significance associated with European settlement within the municipality include rural homesteads, schools, churches, mills, bridges, dry stone walls, aqueducts, reservoirs and their associated land.

A range of issues have been identified in recent community consultation, including:

- Limited interaction with Traditional Owners affects understanding and protection of Aboriginal heritage places
- A need to engage with Traditional Owners in land and water management and other Caring for Country practices
- Lack of knowledge in the community of existing heritage places within the municipality
- Lack of heritage-based tourism opportunities



Dry Stone Wall - Whittlesea Green Wedge

Strategic Directions – Connected Community

In response to key issues and opportunities identified by Council’s background research and the community consultation (see **Table 3**. Opportunities identified in Community Consultation – p30), the Strategic Directions below will direct Council’s endeavour toward achieving ‘Connected Community’ in the Green Wedge context:

SD 4.1 - Understand and support the diverse needs of our rural community for environmental, social and economic resilience

Council needs to further understand the diverse needs of our community. Council would also continue to work and partner with different organisations, government agencies to support our community by improving their access to essential resources, services and critical knowledge.

SD 4.2 - Better connect the Green Wedge with our community via communication, placemaking and programs

Stronger connection between our land and people leads to a better understanding and protection of our Green Wedge and associated environmental and landscape features. Our community already value the environmental significance of our Green Wedges, and the positive effects on community wellbeing from enjoying green natural spaces. There is an opportunity to further connect our community with the positive aspects of the Green Wedge via the creation of shared use paths and trails, events, recreation, tourism and environmental programs.

SD 4.3 - Engage and empower community members on various aspects of caring and managing for the Green Wedge

The future of our Green Wedge relies on a strong community of dedicated individuals and groups who have already been actively looking after our Green Wedge land. Council would like to continue to partner with community members and groups, support community-led initiatives, explore ways to further remove the barrier for our rural community to access council information and participate in conversations that will shape the future of our Green wedge.

SD 4.4 - Partner with Traditional Owners to support the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage, improve land and water management and other Caring for Country practices in the Green Wedge

There is an opportunity for Council to partner with Traditional Owners to improve understanding and the preservation and celebration of Aboriginal cultural heritage – the places and artifacts that represent the rich indigenous history of this land. Our community values the Traditional Owners knowledge and connection to Country. Opportunities for partnerships and education can support a greater understanding of Caring for Country practices to improve land and water management outcomes in the Green Wedge.

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Directions
 - Goal 4: Connected Community
 - Key Issues
 - **Strategic Directions**



Governance and Reporting

Governance

The GWMP is developed to guide a whole-of-Council approach to the coordination and implementation of actions within the Whittlesea Green Wedge.

Council is the custodian of this Plan and its successful delivery requires strong collaboration across the whole organisation. This will be facilitated by Council's Integrated Planning Framework which will drive implementation to deliver the outcomes we strive for and the actions we will deliver for our community.

Implementation Plan & Reporting

An Implementation Plan will be developed post endorsement of the Green Wedge Management Plan 2022-2032, in line with Council's Integrated Planning Framework. The Implementation Plan will identify key actions and measures for success in achieving the Strategic Directions and objectives of the Plan.

In accordance with the requirements of the Victorian Government, it is proposed to undertake a five-year review of the Green Wedge Management Plan. This will enable the relevancy and the success of the plan in achieving the vision and objectives to be reviewed. In addition, quarterly reporting on the Plan will enable Council to closely monitor the implementation of the Plan.

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Glossary

Active recreation

Activities that are engaged in for the purpose of relaxation, health and wellbeing or enjoyment with the primary activity requiring physical exertion, and the primary focus on human activity.

Amenity

A collection of qualities that make spaces attractive for human occupation. The features of an area, street or building, that provide facilities and services that contribute to physical or material comfort and benefit, and are valued by users.

Agribusiness

Agribusiness, for the purpose of this Discussion Paper, includes:

- The inputs in agriculture, such as agronomists, chemical suppliers, machinery companies and transport, just to name a few;
- Primary production, or farming, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries;
- Manufacturing activities that process the primary products, such as abattoirs, milk processors, wine making, food manufacturers/processors and sawmills;
- Wholesaling the primary, or processed products, such as grain storage;
- Agri-tourism with our rural landscapes, wineries/vineyards, harvest trails and small-scale food producers who contribute to our visitor economy.

Built form

The height, volume and overall shape of a building as well as its surface appearance.

Caring for Country

Caring for Country is a term used to describe the different sustainable land management practices and initiatives that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertake, and the key role these practices play in continuing culture.

Green Wedge

Non-urban land that is described in a metropolitan fringe planning scheme as being outside an urban growth boundary.

Green Wedge Management Plan

A Council adopted strategy that identifies a vision, objectives and actions for the sustainable management and development of each Green Wedge area.

Land Use

The primary purpose for which the land is used or may be developed.

Land Fragmentation

In the context of agriculture, land fragmentation occurs when farmland is broken up by other uses over time. In areas affected by land fragmentation, farmers sometimes undertake agricultural production across multiple, non-contiguous properties, which can be a barrier to efficiency and productivity.

Open Space

Space open to the sky regardless of its ownership and management arrangements.

Passive recreation

Casual use of open space such as sitting, walking, reading a book, meeting people enjoying the ambience and relaxing.

Urban Growth Boundary

A line drawn around a metropolitan area, defining the limits to urban growth.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme

A legal document prepared by the City of Whittlesea and approved by the Minister for Planning. A planning scheme includes:

- State Planning Policy set by the Victorian Government and common to all planning schemes.
- Local Planning Policy tailored by each local government.
- Zones and Overlays: provisions that identify where certain uses and development can occur in the municipality, locations of significance such as heritage places, and which land use or development is 'as of right', requires a permit or is prohibited.

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