

*Let's
talk*

Engaging with community to shape the City of Whittlesea Community Plan 2021-2025



**City of
Whittlesea**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT JUNE 2021



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.

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LET'S TALK: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 2021

Over February and March 2021, Council asked those who live and work in the City of Whittlesea what is important to them. We did this to ensure our four-year Community Plan (2021-25) was developed with the community's concerns and priorities at its heart.

Council asked the community:

- **What should Council focus on over the next 4-10 years** to make sure Whittlesea is a connected community, with liveable neighbourhoods, a vibrant economy and sustainable environment?
- **How should Council's \$2M COVID-19 Community Recovery Fund should be spent** to best help our community recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?

More than 1,300 people joined the conversation, giving Council a strong understanding of community sentiment on these important issues. The results of this engagement have informed the Community Plan 2021-25, including our COVID-19 recovery response and other important policy areas, such as health and wellbeing, disability, ageing well, arts and culture, green wedge, climate change, and social and affordable housing.

This report shares what the community told us, examining findings by place, *Whittlesea 2040 goals* and distinct community cohorts.



AT A GLANCE

HOW WE ENGAGED

Council conducted 40 online and face-to-face events and activities in total to ensure we heard from as many different people as possible. This included:



A survey completed online and via printed postcards, with opportunities to contribute to Whittlesea 2040 Goals and other Council strategies. A total of 786 people and 26 local community service providers completed the survey.



12 pop-up stalls held at shopping centres, playgrounds and community centres and events throughout the municipality.



17 targeted focus group sessions with 212 people. These focus groups were designed to reach those whose voices are traditionally less prominent in our engagement efforts. This includes young people, Aboriginal communities, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, LGBTIQ+ community members, people with disabilities and their carers, and seniors.



Activities and conversations at pop ups and events including drawings, event recordings and voting, captured feedback of 279 people.



An online participatory budgeting workshop to develop recommendations for the \$2M COVID-19 Community Recovery Fund. A group of 26 representative citizens deliberated over three online sessions to develop recommendations to help our community recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

WHO WE ENGAGED



1,329 people in total

People from every suburb across our established (50%), growth (38%) and rural areas (12%).



A mix of people who live in the City of Whittlesea (77%), work here (10%), own a business here (3%), study here (1%), work for the City of Whittlesea (12%), regularly visit for a range of other reasons (6%)



People in all age groups



More than a quarter of the 1,329 people we engaged **speak one or more of 50 languages** other than English



This included...



People with a **disability** and their carers



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders



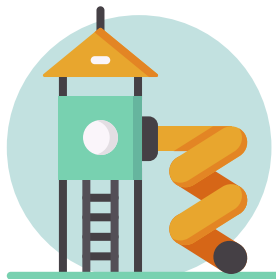
People who **identify as LGBTQ+**



26 community service organisations

WHAT WE HEARD

Across all our engagement activities, people were strongly in favour of:



1

More parks and playgrounds and improving the maintenance for those we already have.



2

Roads as a priority, including safety, roadworks and maintenance.



3

Support for local businesses, helping them grow with grants, incentives and marketing assistance.



4

Biodiversity, including planting more trees, conserving habitats and looking after wildlife.



5

Improving waste management, especially promoting recycling and practical systems for hard rubbish and green waste.

Next top priorities

6



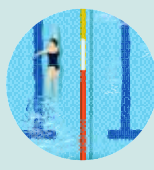
Local shops

7



Public safety

8



Community facilities and infrastructure

9



Local employment

10



Festivals/events/arts/markets

We spoke to people from every suburb, to find out what they need in their area:

- In the **established suburbs** such as Thomastown, Lalor and Bundoora, residents want Council to provide high quality waste management services and promote vibrant communities through festivals and events. They also want more opportunities to find meaningful work close to home.
- People in our **growth areas**, including Mernda and Wollert, want to see better connected and safer roads to reduce their travel times. As these communities grow, residents want access to more leisure facilities and community spaces close to home.
- In the **rural north area and Whittlesea Township**, people highlighted the need to support local businesses. Looking after the natural environment is another major priority for this community, as well as participating in community groups and local employment.

Our community is diverse, with different ideas and priorities for the future:

We heard from:

- **People with disability**, who are striving for greater inclusion in community life, through more access to employment, community facilities and accessible housing.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**, who highlight the importance of having their cultural heritage and history better recognised, as well as being listened to more consistently in local decision-making.
- **Older residents**, who emphasise the need for safer neighbourhoods and public spaces, with access to community and health services that are designed for ageing residents.
- **Young people**, who demand better youth activities and employment pathways, and more inclusion of diverse groups.
- **Culturally and linguistically diverse communities**, who highlight the need for more support for recent arrivals and places for groups to meet and share cultural traditions.
- The **LGBTIQ+ community**, who want increased community awareness about LGBTIQ+ people, and to feel safe in their workplaces and other public spaces.
- **Local service providers**, who highlight the importance of increasing access to opportunities and services for everyone. They also want Council to focus on promoting environmentally sustainable practices among individuals and businesses.

To help recovery from COVID-19, the community would like Council to focus on:



Developing community connections, including supporting vulnerable people and community service organisations, and by providing facilities and spaces for groups of people to meet.



Promoting health and wellbeing, emphasising mental health support, COVID-19 vaccinations and more health and recreational facilities.



Supporting the economy and business, particularly by helping small businesses and creating secure employment opportunities for young residents and unemployed people.



Taking care of our environment and public spaces, with better local parks, community gardens and public facilities.

COVID-19 RECOVERY







Throughout 2020 and 2021, our community has faced unprecedented challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many areas of our lives including mental and physical health, financial security, employment and relationships.

To support our community in response to these challenges, Council has committed \$2 million to a Community Recovery Fund. We asked how we can best spend this money to help the community recover from the pandemic.


Community survey

When we asked what we should do to support the recovery, the community identified a diverse range of priorities. Overall, responses focused on promoting community cohesion, rebuilding the economy, and looking after physical and mental health.

479
PEOPLE
RESPONDED
TO THIS
QUESTION

Top 10 focus areas to help our community recover from COVID-19		%
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance and support for businesses • Local jobs, training and employment pathways • Promotion of shopping at local businesses 	22% 18% 15%
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for vulnerable community e.g. food relief, donations, visits • Green spaces and recreational facilities • Community events and markets • Council relations and community engagement • Community programs, centres and libraries 	22% 16% 16% 15% 12%
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health assistance • Health services including vaccination programs 	13% 10%
Total respondents		479

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)



What did people say?

“Provide grants and funding to legitimate businesses who have suffered, and some good events for the community.”

“Support local businesses who pay local people. Help them with rents and rates.”

“Facilitate events and gatherings to bring people together – rebuild sense of community.”

“Run free or discounted fitness classes for the community to be involved in.”

“Employ more mental health professionals to support the community and make these easily accessible.”

“Provide employment opportunities and assistance; training opportunities, especially for those who are struggling; help people to transition from different industries if they need to.”

“Support for young people entering the job market including mental health support.”

Participatory budgeting workshop

In addition to the community survey, 26 residents took part in a workshop to develop recommendations for the \$2M COVID-19 Community Recovery Fund. This randomly selected group reflected the diverse City of Whittlesea community.

Together, they considered the evidence and impact of the pandemic on residents and businesses, and through a guided, deliberative process, developed a list of recommendations to help our community recover, which Council is currently considering, and which closely aligns with the community survey sentiment on this issue:

Whittlesea 2040 goal	Participatory Budgeting Workshop participants' recommendations for pandemic recovery
 <p>Connected community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency relief support for families experiencing hardship • Strengthen multichannel communications with community and local businesses • Provide funding to existing services and organisations to support the more vulnerable people in our community • Establish local community hubs to increase community-Council connection
 <p>Liveable neighbourhoods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more community gardens and support local events • Advocate for better public transport • Build health and recreational facilities • Provide more public amenities and improve appearance of community shopping areas/strips
 <p>Strong local economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business support program and incentives to buy local • Enhanced learning and job ready opportunities for young people • Increased training and support for unemployed and underemployed residents • Create an enabling environment to establish strong business networks
 <p>Sustainable environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivise battery uptake for solar households, conduct a sustainability audit and upgrades for renters, businesses etc., and facilitate other green initiatives including renewable energy • Continue solar panel and battery scheme for council buildings to reduce running costs to community groups

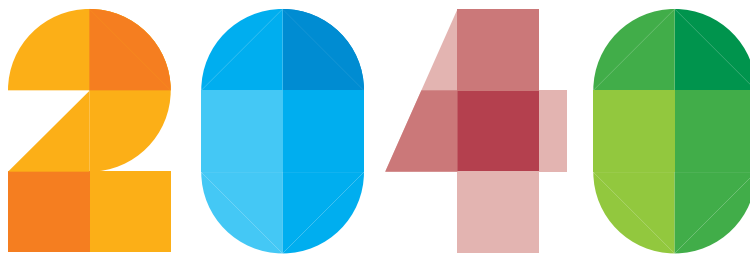
WHITTLESEA 2040 GOALS

Whittlesea 2040: A place for all is the long-term vision for the City of Whittlesea. This vision was created in 2017-2018 through research, workshopped priorities and by speaking to thousands of people, community groups and organisations across the municipality.

A place for all contains four key goals that guide Council's work and partnerships with the community and others. These goals are that the City of Whittlesea will become a connected community, with liveable neighbourhoods, a vibrant economy and a sustainable environment.

In preparing for the Community Plan 2021-25, we asked people what we should focus on over the next four years to ensure we reach our vision.

WHITTLESEA



A place for all

GOAL 1

CONNECTED COMMUNITY

The community's goal is that everyone in our City is welcome and all ways of life are celebrated and supported.

A total of 498 people shared their views about our connected community. Respondents identified the following top focus areas.

Top 5 focus areas		% of all respondents to Goal 1
1. Public safety	Feeling safe in public spaces, reducing crime, and having a sufficient police presence.	30%
2. Festivals, events, arts and markets	More public festivals and events to connect and celebrate their diverse community.	25%
3. Social connection	More opportunities to engage with other people in their suburb, form friendships and support groups.	17%
4. Access and inclusion	Importance of both physical accessibility of public spaces as well as involvement in community life.	12%
5. Community groups	Social groups with others in their community, particularly groups formed with a particular purpose.	11%
	Total respondents	498

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)

The local view

Public safety was a significant concern for people from Thomastown and Mill Park. Meanwhile, people from Lalor and South Morang would like Council to run more festivals and events.

What did people say?

Our focus groups gave us deeper, more diverse insights into what a connected community means:

- **Aboriginal community members** emphasised the importance of acknowledging and documenting Aboriginal history, and more consistent inclusion of Aboriginal people when decisions are made.
- **Young people** said they want more community activities and spaces for young people, and greater acceptance of diversity.
- Our **culturally and linguistically diverse community** told us they value a place that is free from racism, where people can share and celebrate cultural traditions, and easily access health and human services.
- **LGBTIQ+ community members** see a need for increased awareness about LGBTIQ+ people and issues across all of the community and those who provide services to the community.
- **Older residents** highlighted the need for safer public spaces, support navigating online information and more health and wellbeing services that are targeted to older residents' needs.
- **People with disability** said they value increased inclusion of people with disability in everyday life, through transport, communication, public space and access to supports.

"Better security in public places."

"Places for women - and men to connect and form friendships."

"Promote COVID-safe outdoor community events."

"Create community groups for different situations like mothers' groups."

"Be more inclusive."



Top priorities for local service providers



**Access and
inclusion**



**Working in
partnerships**



**Cultural
communities**



**Mental
health**

COMMUNITY FOCUS:

People with disability

When we asked what Council should focus on to make our community more inclusive for people with disability, people identified the following issues and actions:

Priorities	% of respondents
Create more employment opportunities for people with disability	59%
Improve access to our buildings and streets	50%
Support carers of people with a disability	44%
Increase access to local disability and mainstream services	43%
Eliminate discrimination towards people with disability	33%

39 people gave further information about what an inclusive community looks and feels like to them. The main themes were...

54%
Improved
accessibility to
public spaces and
facilities

34%
More
inclusive
community
attitudes

15%
Improved
consultation
in design
of services

10%
More
employment
opportunities

8%
More financial
support for
vulnerable groups

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)





COMMUNITY FOCUS:

Ageing Well

When we asked what services are most important in supporting older people to continue to live and age well, people identified the following:

Priorities	% of all respondents
In-home support to help older people stay at home and independent	76%
Support to reduce social isolation and loneliness	71%
Opportunities for older people to remain physically active	66%
Group programs to help older people stay connected and provide carers with a break	51%
Learning programs for older people	29%

People also told us what was most important to them when choosing a potential aged care service provider. They said the following:

Considerations	% of scores
Trust in service provider	20%
Access to a locally based provider	19%
Quality of care being offered	17%
Cost of services (value for money)	15%
Well trained and qualified staff	16%
Flexibility of service delivery	14%

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)

COMMUNITY FOCUS:

Racism

Through the Community Plan engagement process, 35 people also gave us more detailed views on racism.

- Just over half of these 35 respondents spoke a language other than English.
- 34% of this group disagreed with the statement “Racism is a major problem in the City of Whittlesea” however 28.6% agreed that it was a problem, while 37.1% of people neither agreed or disagreed.
- 32% of respondents said they have been the subject of racism
- 50% of respondents said they have witnessed racism.

People in this group of 35 also gave their thoughts on what Council should do to address racism in the community:

“I think racism is taught not born with. Encourage everyone to be treated equal.”

“Try to have more activities involving all the different cultures.”

“More campaigns to raise awareness. Courses and training.”

“Consult with multicultural community groups – they would have a better idea of when it occurs and what could be done. Identify places and situations where people feel unsafe.”

“Hold inclusive talks and programs with inclusion of all members of the community.”

GOAL 2

LIVEABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Our community's vision is that our City is well planned and beautiful, and our neighbourhoods and town centres are convenient and vibrant places to live, work and play.

A total of 629 people shared their views about our liveable neighbourhoods. Respondents identified the following top focus areas.

Top 5 focus areas		% of all respondents to Goal 2
1. Parks/ playgrounds	More green open spaces to play, exercise and meet others. Existing parks and playgrounds maintained and clean.	50%
2. Roads	Local roads, including roadworks, maintenance and safety.	34%
3. Local shops	More cafés and restaurants and accessing a broader range of shopping options in local neighbourhoods.	25%
4. Community facilities and infrastructure	More sports and aquatic facilities to support health and wellbeing, and large community halls for hosting gatherings.	23%
5. Clean streets and spaces	Less rubbish and tidier nature strips in neighbourhoods and shopping areas.	16%
	Total respondents	629

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)

The local view

Roads were the highest priority for people in Mernda, while bike and walking paths were emphasised by residents of Whittlesea Township. Comparatively, people who live in Donnybrook and Lalor were more concerned with having greater access to parks and playgrounds.

What did people say?

Our focus groups gave us deeper, more diverse insights into what liveable neighbourhoods mean:

- **For Aboriginal community members**, seeing Aboriginal cultural history displayed in town centres and on key buildings, with more consideration given to Aboriginal place names in our community.
- **Young people** value having access to better connected transport options and more well-maintained public spaces.
- **Culturally and linguistically diverse community** members want more places for community groups to meet, including halls, community centres and parks.
- **LGBTIQ+ people** highlighted the need for more gender-neutral public toilets throughout the municipality.
- **Older residents** want local parks and footpaths that are free from hazards for older people, with plenty of toilets and seating available.
- **People with disability** emphasise the need for more accessible housing options, particularly among rental properties and new builds. This community wants universal design principles guiding the design of open spaces, shopping centres and community facilities.

“More all abilities playgrounds and outdoor exercise equipment.”

“Smaller community hubs rather than large shopping centres.”

“Safe roads proportional to the population growth in the area.”

“We desperately need a sports and aquatic centre with a swimming pool... and a good big gym!”

“More local cafés/eateries that focus on healthy eating – nice cafés don’t exist.”

“Much more cleaning needed in the area.”

Top priorities for local service providers



Parks and playgrounds



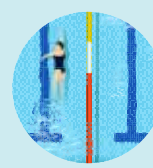
Housing



Public transport



Transport



Facilities and infrastructure

What did people say?

...about the need for social and affordable housing in the City of Whittlesea:

“Social housing should be integrated well into ‘normal’ housing developments. Standalone social housing will create stigma and division in the community. Transitional housing and emergency accommodation is also needed locally, especially for key groups like young people and people impacted by family violence.”

“Rental housing around Whittlesea Township is in short supply as is suitable housing for elderly residents. Long-term, reliable and affordable rental is often the only option for lower income people. We focus too much on home ownership.”

“Affordable and social housing is more important in areas where there are job opportunities.”

“Social and affordable housing needs to be accessible for young people, people with a disability or those that have limited access to ownership or rental housing.”

COMMUNITY FOCUS:

Social and affordable housing

We asked the community to rate their level of agreement with three statements about social and affordable housing:

76%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREED

there should be more social and affordable housing for households with low to moderate incomes in the City of Whittlesea.

74%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREED

there should be more housing services in the City of Whittlesea to support people to access affordable housing.

70%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREED

that Council should take action to increase the supply of social and affordable housing within the City of Whittlesea.

54
PEOPLE
GAVE THEIR
VIEWS ABOUT
SOCIAL AND
AFFORDABLE
HOUSING.



COMMUNITY FOCUS:

Health

When asked in more detail about what Council should focus on to improve the health and wellbeing of our community, people identified the following areas:

Focus areas	% of respondents
Mental health and wellbeing	55%
Social connection	50%
Physical health and activity	48%
Safety in public places	45%
Traffic congestion and commute times	44%

Council provides a range of services and amenities to improve the health and wellbeing of our community. People told us that the following were most important to them:

Services and amenities	% of respondents
Natural environments and green open spaces	82%
Tree-lined streets, parks and walking paths	76%
Well-connected walking and cycling paths/trails	65%
Places to exercise (e.g. gyms, pools)	55%
Libraries	55%

**84
PEOPLE**
CAVE THEIR VIEWS
ABOUT THE FUTURE
DIRECTION OF THE
HEALTH PLAN.

Other prominent themes highlighted by respondents were:



Exercise options



Access to services



Green spaces, biodiversity and sustainable energy



Active transport



Libraries

GOAL 3

STRONG LOCAL ECONOMY

Our community's vision is that our City is the smart choice for innovation, business growth and industry investment.

A total of 408 people shared their views about our strong local economy. Respondents identified the following top focus areas.

Top 5 focus areas		% of all respondents to Goal 3
1. Support local business	Helping local business grow, with grants, incentives and marketing.	47%
2. Local employment	A greater number and diversity of job opportunities close to home.	32%
3. Economic development	Promoting local consumption, attracting new businesses to the area and strengthening local industries.	20%
4. Technology, innovation and infrastructure	Modern digital connectivity, business parks and coworking spaces to support new ideas and enterprise.	12%
5. Employment pathways	Opportunities for skills development and training, especially for young people and people who are long-term unemployed.	11%
	Total respondents	408

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)

The local view

While supporting local businesses was highlighted as a key priority throughout the City of Whittlesea, it is particularly important for residents of Epping North, Whittlesea Township and the rural north region. People in Whittlesea Township also want more local employment opportunities, and residents of Bundoora want Council to develop technology and infrastructure.

What did people say?

Our focus groups gave us deeper, more diverse insights into what a strong local economy means:

- **Aboriginal community members** said they want improved employment support for Aboriginal young people and education for employers of Aboriginal people.
- **Young people** need more opportunities to access training and work in the local area.
- **Culturally and linguistically diverse community** members highlighted the need for more employment pathways and assistance for recent arrivals and communities.
- **LGBTIQ+ people** highlighted the importance of promoting workplace and education settings that are inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people, as well as queer enterprise and business opportunities.
- **Older residents** said they value opportunities to share knowledge and skills, particularly in the workplace or on a volunteer basis.
- **People with disability** need improved access to secure and meaningful employment opportunities, with employers that are flexible and supportive of people with disability.

“Support local business, by promoting and educating and assisting them to grow.”

“Provide professional expertise and advocacy to start-ups.”

“Develop local markets.”

“Creation of jobs/opportunities for all ages.”

“More job opportunities so people can stay within their municipality, creating ownership and connection with the area they reside.”

“Vouchers to local community to encourage local spending.”

Top priorities for local service providers



**Local
employment**



Education



**Employment
pathways**



**Support local
business**

COMMUNITY FOCUS: ARTS AND CULTURE

We asked what we should focus on so that everyone in our community can enjoy and participate in arts and culture. People identified the following top priorities:

Priorities	% of respondents
Running local festivals and events	64%
Opportunities to engage with Aboriginal arts and culture	51%
Sharing and celebrating our local diverse cultures	49%
Creative activities for children, young people and families	48%
Places for artists and creatives to exhibit or share work	36%
An affordable program of arts and theatre at Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre	31%

**61
PEOPLE**
GAVE THEIR VIEWS
ABOUT THE FUTURE
DIRECTION OF THE
ARTS AND CULTURE
IN THE CITY OF
WHITTLESEA.

When asked what sort of arts and culture activities they would like to see in their area, people said:

Services and amenities	% of respondents
Live music	66%
Theatre/performance	57%
Painting	51%
Photography	48%
Dance	48%

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)





GOAL 4

SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

Our community's vision is that our City's landscapes and natural environment are an enduring source of pride.

A total of 391 people shared their views about our sustainable environment. Respondents identified the following top focus areas.

Top 5 focus areas		% of all respondents to Goal 4
1. Biodiversity	Planting more trees, conserving native habitats and looking after wildlife.	46%
2. Waste management	Promotion of recycling, and practical systems for managing hard rubbish and green waste.	46%
3. Sustainability – education and awareness	Promoting green practices at the business and community level.	28%
4. Sustainability – energy and infrastructure	Reduce emissions by investing in solar and wind power and encouraging electric vehicle use.	20%
5. Sustainability – household living	Supporting families and households on growing food, composting and recycling.	17%
	Total respondents	391

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)

The local view

Waste management was a particularly strong priority for residents of Bundoora and Thomastown, while people from Doreen and Whittlesea Township highlighted the need to take care of our biodiversity.

What did people say?

Our focus groups gave us deeper, more diverse insights into what a sustainable environment means:

- **Aboriginal community members** highlighted increased efforts to work with the traditional owners of the land, incorporating Wurundjeri knowledge about caring for country into maintenance of local parks and reserves.
- **Young people** want to see better conservation of trees and natural habitats, and education of the community about sustainable living.
- **Culturally and linguistically diverse community** members said they value restoring native vegetation as well as community education about waste management. They also want opportunities to share gardening skills and knowledge from different cultures.
- **LGBTIQ+ people** highlighted the importance of ensuring that parks and natural spaces cater to diverse communities and increasing Council leadership on environmental protection.
- **Older residents** want to see cleaner parks, more appropriate street trees, and a greater consideration of the impact of development on natural features in the area.
- **People with disability** emphasised the need for more urban tree cover. They also want accessible information on sustainable living practices, as well as being consulted on what barriers they face to living sustainably.

"Better waste management with strategies to engage and connect the community."

"More bins at shops and parks. Too much rubbish left everywhere."

"Focus on environment, sustainability and preserving wildlife."

"Better education for locals around recycling and green waste."

"Protection of native fauna and flora."

"Open community gardens in high-density areas."

Top priorities for local service providers



**Sustainability
awareness and education**



**Waste
management**



Biodiversity

COMMUNITY FOCUS: CLIMATE CHANGE

To help our community adapt to climate change and reduce its effects, people said Council should focus on:

Focus areas	% of respondents
Renewable energy like solar and wind power	68%
Supporting sustainable transport like cycling, walking and public transport	57%
Improving the energy efficiency of buildings and facilities	42%
Building and maintaining climate resilient infrastructure	31%
Reducing reliance on gas	14%

The main findings from the Whittlesea Climate Change Focus Group were (12 participants):

- Education and awareness are vital; many people don't know or don't believe in climate change
- Council should play a leadership role in climate change actions and promote sustainable living to residents
- Council leading by example also means using electric fleet vehicles and using environmentally friendly services

When asked what sort of arts and culture activities they would like to see in their area, people said:

Themes	% of respondents
More appropriate biodiversity	48%
Renewable energy e.g. solar power, energy-efficient homes	45%
Better energy-efficient infrastructure	23%
Maintain parks/green spaces	20%
Educated community	18%

81
PEOPLE
GAVE THEIR
VIEWS ABOUT OUR
CLIMATE CHANGE
STRATEGY.



COMMUNITY FOCUS: GREEN WEDGE

The green wedge is the non-urban land that surrounds the outward growth of suburbs in the City of Whittlesea.

The community connects with our City's 'green wedge' for a diverse range of reasons. These include:

Priorities	% of respondents
I visit for exercise or recreation	54%
I live there	35%
I buy fresh food produced there	26%
I visit family or friends there	20%
No connection, I have never visited the area	9%
I work there	4%

**81
PEOPLE**
GAVE THEIR VIEWS
ABOUT THE FUTURE
DIRECTION OF
THE GREEN WEDGE
STRATEGY.

We asked the community what they value most about the 'green wedge' parts of the City:

	% of respondents
Just the pure existence of natural landscapes and features like hills, trees, waterways and animals	76%
The positive effects on my wellbeing from enjoying green natural spaces	72%
Environmental benefits (e.g. reduced pollution in the air and water)	68%
Local food produced in the area	37%
Local jobs in agriculture and related industries	30%
Cultural or spiritual connection with the land	28%

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)

GOAL 5

HIGH PERFORMING ORGANISATION


Alongside the four major *Whittlesea 2040* goal areas, the community survey also revealed peoples' views about the performance of Council. These views referred to the quality of Council services, the way it communicates with residents, and its responsiveness to changing community needs.

A total of 163 people shared their views about our high performing organisation. Respondents identified the following top focus areas.

Top 5 focus areas	% of all respondents who shared views on Council performance.
1. Council policy and decision-making	33%
2. Communication with community	26%
3. Service quality	19%
4. Listening to community	15%
5. Rates	13%
Total respondents	163

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)





What did people say?

“Maintain a reasonable rate for ratepayers.”

“Spend community finances in smart and economic ways without cutting on safety.”

“Provide multi-language signage and newsletters.”

“Ensure outcomes for community are considered at all times.”

“Focus on the actual community and its needs, not on party politics and political affiliations of councillors.”

Top priorities for local service providers



Council performance



Communication with community

Across all *Whittlesea 2040* goal areas, the top 10 areas Council should focus on over the next 4-10 years are:

		No. of respondents	% of total respondents
1. Parks/playgrounds	More green open spaces to play, exercise and meet others. Existing parks and playgrounds maintained and clean.	317	46%
2. Roads	Local roads, including roadworks, maintenance and safety.	215	31%
3. Support for local business	Help local business grow, with grants, incentives and marketing.	192	28%
4. Biodiversity	Planting more trees, conserving native habitats and looking after wildlife.	178	26%
5. Waste management	Promotion of recycling, and practical systems for managing hard rubbish and green waste.	178	26%
6. Local shops	More cafés and restaurants and accessing a broader range of shopping options in local neighbourhoods.	155	22%
7. Public safety	Feeling safe in public spaces, reducing crime, and having enough police presence.	149	21%
8. Community facilities and infrastructure	More sports and aquatic facilities to support health and wellbeing, and large community halls for hosting gatherings.	147	21%
9. Local employment	A greater number and diversity of job opportunities close to home.	129	19%
10. Festivals/events/arts/markets	More public festivals and events to connect and celebrate their diverse community.	129	18%

(Respondents could identify more than one focus area, so percentages do not add up to 100%)



OUR PRECINCTS

Survey respondents came from every suburb across the City of Whittlesea. Looking at responses by place provides great insight into what matters at a more local level.

Established areas

Located in the southern part of the City of Whittlesea, our established areas were the first developed suburbs in the municipality. These suburbs are growing slowly, with fewer young families and more older residents compared to the City's growth areas.

In the established suburbs, residents want Council to provide higher quality **waste management** services and to promote vibrant communities through more **festivals and events**. They also want more opportunities to find **meaningful work**.



TOP 3 PRIORITIES IN EACH SUBURB

Epping

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Roads
3. Biodiversity

Lalor

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Festivals/events/arts/markets
3. Local shops

Thomastown

1. Waste management
2. Parks/playgrounds
3. Public safety

South Morang

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Roads
3. Support local business

Mill Park

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Roads
3. Support local business

Bundoora

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Waste management
3. Biodiversity

56%
OF THE CITY
OF WHITTLESEA'S
POPULATION LIVE
IN ESTABLISHED
AREAS.

50%
OF PEOPLE WHO
PARTICIPATED
WERE FROM THE
ESTABLISHED
AREAS.

**LOWER
REPRESENTATION
FROM LALOR,
THOMASTOWN,
BUNDOORA AND
HIGHER FROM
EPPING.**

Growth areas

The City of Whittlesea's growth areas are new suburbs with significant housing development and future population growth. These suburbs attract many young couples and families who are looking to start a new life in the area.

People in our growth areas want to see **better connected and safer roads** to reduce their travel times. As these communities grow, residents want access to more **leisure facilities** and **community spaces** close to home.



TOP 3 PRIORITIES IN EACH SUBURB

Donnybrook

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Social connection
3. Roads

Wollert

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Roads
3. Local shops

Doreen

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Roads
3. Community facilities and infrastructure

Mernda

1. Roads
2. Parks/playgrounds
3. Support local business

Epping North

1. Parks/playgrounds
2. Support local business
3. Biodiversity

40%
OF THE CITY
OF WHITTLESEA'S
POPULATION
LIVE IN GROWTH
AREAS.

38%
OF PEOPLE
WHO PARTICIPATED
WERE FROM
THE GROWTH
AREAS.

WOLLERT'S
REPRESENTATION
IS HIGH
AND EPPING
NORTH LOW.

Rural north and Whittlesea Township

Beyond its established and growth suburbs, the City of Whittlesea has a large rural area containing farmland and a range of natural wildlife and biodiversity. Whittlesea Township provides facilities and services to people who live in this area.

Residents of the Whittlesea Township and rural north region recognise the need for **better supported local businesses**. They also want improved **protection of the native flora and fauna** that surrounds their area.



TOP 3 PRIORITIES IN EACH SUBURB

Whittlesea Township

1. Support local business
2. Biodiversity
3. Parks/playgrounds

Rural north region

1. Support local business
2. Community groups
3. Roads

4%
OF THE CITY OF
WHITTLESEA'S
POPULATION LIVE IN
THE RURAL AREA
AND WHITTLESEA
TOWNSHIP.

THEY
MADE UP
14%
OF ALL
PARTICIPANTS.







CONCLUSION

Over February and March 2021, Whittlesea City Council undertook a range of community engagement activities designed to gather input for the City's Community Plan. Through these activities, which included a large survey and a series of focus groups, as well as pop-up events across the municipality, Council asked the community to share their priorities for the next 4-10 years. Responses were structured within the five goals of *Whittlesea 2040*: connected community, liveable neighbourhoods, strong local economy, sustainable environment, and a high performing organisation.

The results of the engagement activities reflected the very diverse interests and needs of the City of Whittlesea community. While responses were varied, a consistent theme throughout the activities was the strong emphasis on liveable neighbourhoods. In particular, respondents across the established suburbs expressed an interest in having access to green spaces and parks, while people from Wollert and Mernda also highlighted the need for better connected roads and reduced traffic. Access to community facilities such as leisure centres and events spaces was another major concern for people from growth areas.

In addition to physical infrastructure and spaces, people also highlighted the importance of social cohesion. In the next four years, respondents would like Council to focus on promoting community connections through festivals and events, as well as maintaining public safety and enabling inclusion of diverse groups.

In the recovery from COVID-19, many residents and business owners are concerned about the outlook of the local economy. This was reflected in the engagement activities with the emphasis placed on supporting local businesses and creating new employment opportunities.

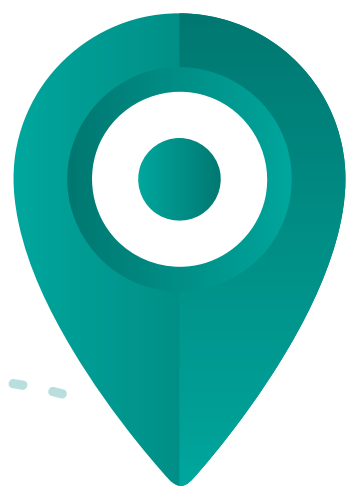
The findings from this engagement will inform initiatives and priorities in the City of Whittlesea Community Plan 2021-25.

NOTES ON THE ENGAGEMENT

The *Let's Talk* community engagement program was designed to gather the insights and opinions from all parts of the City of Whittlesea community. The aim of our mixed-methods approach was to ensure that the community priorities included in the Community Plan 2021-25 reflect the true needs of our diverse City.

Overall, the engagement program achieved a strong level of representation, with a confidence interval of ± 3.53 per cent. However, the level of representation varied between precincts and demographic cohorts. Although the activities drew significantly on the views of middle-aged and older residents, one limitation is the significant underrepresentation of young people aged 16-24 years. While a targeted focus group was held to strengthen the overall input from young residents, further work is required in future engagements to ensure this growing cohort is better represented.

In addition, the engagement findings revealed an underrepresentation of people who live in established suburbs, namely Bundoora, Thomastown and Lalor. It is possible that low survey participation in these suburbs is the result of the high share of older residents, living in couples or alone, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Alternative engagement methods, including additional focus groups or incorporating consultation into existing social groups, may be necessary to improve representation in these suburbs.



FOCUS GROUPS IN-DEPTH

Our community is diverse, with different ideas and priorities for the future. Key questions and targeted consultation sessions were held to hear from as many different people as possible. This included people with disabilities and their carers, First Nations communities, multicultural communities, young people, seniors and those who identify as LGBTIQ+.





Aboriginal community

Focus groups which discussed priorities for the Aboriginal community included Whittlesea Reconciliation Group/Aboriginal community members (12 participants), Wurundjeri Traditional Owners Group (2 participants) and the Whittlesea Aboriginal Staff Network (6 participants).

Issues identified in the Aboriginal community focus groups include:

- Inclusion of Aboriginal representation at decision-making tables.
- Keeping Aboriginal community informed of opportunities to participate/have a say in council
- Create a more welcoming environment.
- Culturally specific referrals to health and cultural services.
- Provide more gathering places for community groups.
- Elders of each cultural group to tell their story of migration and history
- It is vital that there is a process put in place to document and acknowledge history and the impacts associated.
- It is important to show non-Aboriginal people ways to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the land with respect and without appropriation.
- Sacred sites need to be protected.
- Town centres and key buildings/structures to display Aboriginal cultural history.
- More consideration should be given to Aboriginal place names in our community.
- Linking schools and early childhood centres and tertiary providers with cultural educators.
- Employment education/assistance is important for employers of, and for young Aboriginal people.
- Support Aboriginal enterprise.
- Caring for country (cult heritage Act 2006).
- Value and engage with Wurundjeri knowledge for land care and sustainability practices.



Culturally diverse community

Focus groups which discussed priorities for culturally diverse communities included the Whittlesea Multicultural External Reference Group (12 participants), Whittlesea Multicultural Communities Council/Whittlesea Interfaith Network (12 participants), Arabic Speaking Community Group (18 participants) and the Whittlesea CALD COVID-19 Response Network (11 participants).

Issues identified in the culturally diverse community focus groups include:

- People from culturally diverse communities find it difficult to access information about services and programs are available to them (Centrelink, health, mental health, transport).
- Promote connection between different groups (eg young people, older people).
- Increase awareness of cultural events.
- More places for community groups to meet. This includes halls, community centres and parks.
- Council to aim programs towards diverse groups within the community.
- The theme of racism was common in the focus groups. People from culturally diverse backgrounds do not feel safe in our community.
- Provide safety in public places (lighting, Police presence).
- Better transport connections (trains, trams, buses, taxis, ubers)
- Improve traffic management.
- It is important to share cultural traditions with the community in the form of education, activities and events.
- Encourage volunteering.
- More local jobs.
- Help businesses become COVID-19 safe.
- Business support regarding training, mentors and networking.
- Provide employment pathways and assistance for recent arrivals and communities.
- Training and education support for those who don't speak English well.
- Reduce number of cars on the road to reduce congestion and pollution.
- Protect the green wedge.
- Local harvest sharing.



People with a disability

Focus groups which discussed priorities for people with a disability included Whittlesea Disability Network Meeting (15 participants), DAP – Broader Internal Staff Workshop (40 participants) and the Staff Disability Focus Group (seven participants).

Issues identified in the disability community focus group include:

- To better include people with a disability in everyday life in our community. Accessing public transport, events, shopping, and other community facilities can be very difficult and can be traumatic for people with a disability. This results in people with a disability becoming disconnected with their community.
- People with a disability find it difficult to access information about what disability-related and general services and programs are available to them.
- There is a shortage of accessible housing in the City of Whittlesea. Agents and landlords refuse requests to add accessible features such as handrails in rental properties. Many people with a disability have low incomes and live in rental properties.
- People with a disability find it very difficult to find employment. Workplace education and flexibility are an important tool to help break down barriers. Working from home is a great example of how employers can help employees with a disability gain and maintain employment.



Young people

Young people were represented during an online youth forum held by the City of Whittlesea (11 participants).

Issues identified in the youth focus group include:

- Allowing and accepting people to be who they want to be.
- Better connecting transport in the northern suburbs.
- Community activities and places to go for young people that don't require supervision.
- Create employment pathways for local young people.
- Maintain the appearance of public spaces.
- Provide places to go when it is not safe to be at home.
- Conserve more trees and natural habitats.
- Educate and promote sustainable living.



Older residents

Focus groups which discussed priorities of ageing well included the World Café Seniors Aged 70+ (20 participants).

Issues identified in the ageing well community focus groups include:

- Seniors find it difficult to access information about what seniors-related and general services and programs are available to them.
- Seniors don't feel safe in their neighbourhood. Ways to improve this include increase lighting in public spaces and increase police presence.
- Health and wellbeing services aren't targeted to seniors' needs. More specific equipment and programs should be developed.
- Seniors need help with navigating their way through online systems and when they have technology issues. They feel they are missing out on things due to services/information being delivered online.
- Local parks and footpaths should be free from hazards for older people. Toilets and seating should be provided in local parks.
- Many seniors are under financial stress and cannot find suitable and affordable housing.
- Seniors have an important role to play in passing on knowledge, particularly in the workplace or on a volunteer basis.

LGBTIQ+

The LGBTIQ+ community were represented by the Staff LGBTIQ+ Network (six participants).

Issues identified in the LGBTIQ+ community focus group include:

- Create more awareness about LGBTIQ+ people in communities and for service providers, especially health services.
- Improve access to services and inclusion for marginalised groups such as LGBTIQ+, women, people with disabilities, culturally diverse and those with low incomes.
- Provide local access to LGBTIQ+ services.
- Many LGBTIQ+ people don't feel safe in public places.
- Work with businesses to help LGBTIQ+ people to feel safe in their workplace.
- Provide gender neutral public toilets.
- Provide education about LGBTIQ+ people and their needs.

General community

The general community were represented at the online launch events held on 18 and 22 February 2021 (100 and 25 participants respectively), and at the online focus groups held on 9 & 11 March 2021 (9 and 10 participants respectively).

Priorities:

- To enable social connection to existing and new cultural groups.
- Provide spaces where community leaders can meet with community.
- Council to be more open and available to the community.
- Provide more leisure centres and community facilities to accommodate population growth.
- Provide communal hubs for remote working.
- Council to educate and promote the services it provides to community.
- Increase awareness of mental health from a young age.
- Increase awareness of environmental issues; particularly at school.
- More spaces suitable for youth.
- Increase safety in public areas.
- Make it attractive for large companies to invest in the area.
- Create local retail hubs outside of the mainstream shopping centres.
- Provide Council services in each suburb (at Community Activity Centres).
- Improve road network; increase access to areas.
- Improve traffic management; this has been very poor for a long time.
- Support small businesses; less red tape.
- Utilise the skills and knowledge of the community by promoting volunteers.
- Utilise the skills and knowledge of the community by promoting volunteers.
- Support local manufacturing.
- Business mentoring and training for locals.
- Increase ease of waste removal; etc hard rubbish, electrical waste etc.
- More incentives for sustainable living practices (solar, water tanks).
- Involve community in tree planting.
- Create network for home repairs, mowing, gardening and repairs.
- Council should promote local parks and reserves; including better signage.
- Provide public toilets to open spaces and reserves.
- Maintain parks, reserves and natural spaces.
- Protect biodiversity from pests and pets.
- Ensure action and communication from community engagement activities.

Donnybrook

The Olivine Residents Group discussed issues related to the new growth area Donnybrook (9 participants). Important topics raised in this focus group included:

- To ensure neighbours feel connected in new community.
- Rubbish dumping is an issue in growing estates.
- Transport connection is very poor in the new estates.
- Traffic management needs to be improved as it is dangerous and congestion is terrible.
- Walking paths need to be established to allow connections.
- Sustainable practices should be encouraged.

APPENDIX

List of engagement activities

Type	Detail	Dates
Event	Launch event- Online	18-Feb-21 & 22-Feb-21
Full-length Surveys	Community Survey- online and hardcopy	25-Feb to 22-Mar-21
	Community service provider survey- Whittlesea Community Futures Partners- Online	25-Feb to 20-Mar-21
Postcard survey	Local libraries, kindergarten, Community Activity Centres, Whittlesea Community Connections, and Migrant English Programs at Melb Polytechnic Epping.	9-16 Mar-21
COVID-19 Community Recovery Budgeting Workshop	Online deliberative workshop	18-Mar-21, 25-Mar-21 & 31-Mar-21
Focus Groups	Staff LGBTIQ+ network- online	04-Mar-21
	Youth Forum- online	09-Mar-21
	Climate Change- online	15-Mar-21
	Community focus group-online	09-Mar-21 & 11-Mar-21
	Seniors 70+ (World Café)- Civic Centre	12-Mar-21
	Olivine Residence Group- Olivine Place, Donnybrook	07-Mar-21
	Whittlesea Multicultural External Reference Group (MERG)- online	11-Mar-21
	Arabic Speaking Community Group- online	11-Mar-21
	Whittlesea Multicultural Communities Council (WMCC) + Whittlesea Interfaith Network (WIN)- Lalor Library	17-Mar-21
	Whittlesea CALD COVID Response Network- online	17-Mar-21

Type	Detail	Dates
...Focus Groups continued	Whittlesea Reconciliation Group and Local Aboriginal Network- online	26-Mar-21
	Whittlesea Aboriginal Staff Network- online	16-Mar-21
	Wurundjeri Traditional Owners- online	09-Mar-21
	DAP- Whittlesea Disability Network- Civic Centre	09-Mar-21
	DAP-Disability staff advisory (DSA) group- online	15-Mar-21
	DAP- Broader internal staff workshop- online	15-Mar-21
Pop ups	Whittlesea Township	01-Mar-21
	Epping- Epping Plaza	04-Mar-21
	Lalor- Station Street and May Road	05-Mar-21
	Mill Park- All Abilities Place Space	06-Mar-21
	Donnybrook- Olivine Place	07-Mar-21
	Thomastown- Recreation & Aquatic Centre (TRAC)	10-Mar-21
	South Morang- Plenty Valley Westfield	11-Mar-21
	Epping North- Aurora Shops	12-Mar-21
	Mernda- Mernda Junction Shopping Centre	15-Mar-21
	South Morang- Farmers and Makers Market	20-Mar-21
	Plenty Valley Westfield*	11-Mar-21 & 17 Mar 21

**These two pop ups were located at the children's activity station at the shopping centre, and included dedicated creative and interactive sessions for young children around relevant Whittlesea 2040 goal areas designed and conducted by specialist Early Years Council staff. Children were invited to respond verbally or through drawings to open ended questions and Council staff recorded their responses to inform the development of the Community Plan. Many of the children participated by drawing their vision of what makes the City of Whittlesea a happy and healthy place to live on cut outs of leaves that were displayed on a cardboard tree at the activity site.*





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Whittlesea

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