



**City of
Whittlesea**



Strong Local Economy Strategy Discussion Paper

October 2021

Creating vibrant self-sustaining communities *together*

Strong Local Economy Strategy Discussion Paper

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.

About 50,000 years before colonisation, a diversity of Wurundjeri people, families and communities managed the land that the City of Whittlesea now occupies. Throughout this time the Plenty River and other local natural features provided an abundance of flora and fauna as both a source of food and shelter.

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. The people of the Kulin Nation were both Waang (the Australian raven) and Bunjil (wedge-tailed eagle – the creator) people who shared the same religion and language and lived in what is now metropolitan and greater Melbourne.

The pre-colonial legacy of the Wurundjeri people can still be seen today as the Whittlesea area is home to a number of protected and sacred ‘scarred’ trees. These trees were used for making bark canoes or as boundary markers for distinct tribal groups. Today the scarred river-red gum trees serve as a reminder that Aboriginal people have always been, and will always be, central to the social, economic and cultural prosperity of the City of Whittlesea.

Throughout this document, the term ‘Aboriginal’ is taken to include people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. ‘Aboriginal’ is used in preference to ‘Indigenous’, ‘First Nations’, and ‘Koori’.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea has experienced strong economic growth over the last decade and was one of the fastest growing economies in Victoria. But the last 18 months have been difficult. COVID-19 has caused disruption to livelihoods, education, business operations and family life throughout the municipality. Council has worked hard to support our community through these unprecedented times with a comprehensive Pandemic Recovery Program.

The pandemic and associated lockdowns have highlighted the important contribution our businesses make by providing local jobs and opportunities to connect with each other, as well as enhancing lifestyle and recreation options. A healthy business environment is necessary for the City of Whittlesea to have a vibrant and healthy community.

This Discussion Paper is an important step towards recovery and planning for a strong local economy. Feedback from this consultation will inform the development of our Strong Local Economy Strategy 2021-2026, which will set out how Council will support the creation of local jobs that match the skills of residents, the provision of education and training opportunities for all stages of life and foster a supportive environment that helps businesses to be successful.

Council would like to thank you for taking the time to read this paper and encourages you to provide feedback.

Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All

In 2018 Council adopted *Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All* (Whittlesea 2040) as the long-term vision for the City of Whittlesea. It was derived from thorough research and consultation with residents, business owners, community groups and organisations from across the local government area.

Whittlesea 2040 guides all of Council's work and future partnerships with the community and others. There are five council goals which are further broken down into key directions:

1. Connected community
2. Liveable neighbourhoods
3. Strong local economy
4. Sustainable environment
5. High-performing organisation

Goal 1 Connected community

Key directions:

- A socially cohesive community
- A healthy and safe community
- A participating community

Goal 2 Liveable neighbourhoods

Key directions:

- Smart, connected transport network
- Well-designed neighbourhoods and vibrant town centres
- Housing for diverse needs



Goal 5 High-performing organisation

Key directions:

- Driving better community outcomes
- More informed Council decisions
- More cost-effective investment

Goal 4 Sustainable environment

Key directions:

- Valued natural landscapes and biodiversity
- Climate ready
- Leaders in clean, sustainable living

Goal 3 Strong local economy

Key directions:

- Increased local employment
- Education opportunities for all
- Successful, innovative local businesses

New Integrated Planning Framework

In 2021, Council adopted a new Integrated Planning Framework approach to rationalise the more than 100 community-facing policies, strategies and plans into a smaller number of consolidated strategies. This new approach will focus on the delivery of outcomes, reduce complexity, remove duplication and conflicts and increase transparency.

The new framework aims to align all actions and corporate reporting of Council according to the five goals of Whittlesea 2040. The overall intention is to clearly communicate the aspirations for the City of Whittlesea and the specific role of Council.

The Strong Local Economy Strategy will be the first strategy prepared under the new Integrated Planning Framework. The next strategies to follow will be Connected Community, Liveable Neighbourhoods, Sustainable Environment and High-Performing Organisation.

Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021

The City of Whittlesea's current Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021 is approaching the end of its lifespan. Its vision, *"10,000 new jobs in the City of Whittlesea in five years"*, was structured around five pillars:

1. Strive to build a healthy, prosperous and resilient community
2. Foster an environment that encourages the development of a vibrant local economy
3. Capitalise on the city's human, natural and built resources to maximise local employment
4. Promote the municipality as an attractive destination to invest and work in, visit and enjoy
5. Collaborate with the community, businesses and government to deliver resources and opportunities.

The strategy was successfully implemented with Council delivering a wide range of projects and programs that contributed to an increase of 7300 jobs during the period 2017 to 2020.

Purpose of the Discussion Paper

Council's existing Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021 is coming to its natural conclusion. The economic landscape has also changed. The COVID-19 downturn has created new challenges and opportunities for the City of Whittlesea economy.

Impacts of COVID-19 in the Discussion Paper are reflected as the current point in time. The impacts of the pandemic will continue to be monitored over time as the economy recovers from the current crisis.

This Discussion Paper examines future directions for the Strong Local Economy Strategy, under the three Whittlesea 2040 'key directions' relating to employment, education and business, each with its own proposed objectives, recommended actions and measures. Initiatives will need to allow for flexibility and be agile to support the economic prosperity of the local economy over time and improve resilience in order to respond to potential future shocks.

Council would like to hear from you, the community, regarding how best to improve employment, education and business in the City of Whittlesea local government area (LGA). There are discussion questions included at the end of the paper that we would like your feedback on.

At the conclusion of the consultation period, Council will consider all feedback when developing the Strong Local Economy Strategy.

WHAT YOU HAVE TOLD US

What we have Heard

In 2018, Council conducted extensive consultation of over 4000 people, covering a broad cross section of the community, to prepare Whittlesea 2040.

In early 2021, Council launched the *Let's Talk: Shaping the Community Plan 2021-25* consultation to share its ideas and priorities for Council to focus on delivering over the next four years. The consultation process engaged with more than 1300 people and included the following elements:

- 40 online and face-to-face events
- A survey completed by 786 people and 26 community service providers
- 12 pop-up stalls
- 17 targeted focus group sessions
- Online workshops

The quotes below were taken from the community:

- *"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 and opportunities for all ages."*
- *"More job opportunities so people can stay within their municipality, creating ownership and connection within the area they reside."*
- *"Vouchers to local community to encourage local spending."*

A Proposed Community Plan 2021-25 was prepared in response to feedback received in the *Let's Talk* consultation and placed on public exhibition during August and September 2021. Findings from the exhibition period are being reviewed and will be used to finalise the Community Plan scheduled for adoption during October. Any key findings relating to the Strong Local Economy goal will also be fed into the draft Strong Local Economy Strategy.

Views on a Strong Local Economy

A total of 408 people shared their views regarding a strong local economy. The top focus areas included:

1. *Support for local business* – Helping local businesses 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 co-working spaces to support new ideas and enterprise. (12%)
5. *Employment pathways* – Diverse opportunities for skills development and training, especially for young people and people who are long-term unemployed. (11%)

Economic Priorities of Demographic Groups

The results of focus group interviews to inform the Community Plan revealed what a strong local economy means to different demographic groups within the City of Whittlesea LGA:

- *Aboriginal Community* – desire 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* – highlighted the need for more employment pathways and assistance for the recent arrivals and communities which have different needs.
- *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 their knowledge and skills, particularly in the workplace or on a volunteer basis.
- *People with a Disability* – need improved access to secure, meaningful employment opportunities, with employers that are flexible and supportive of people with a disability.

Environment for Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise

In mid-2021, Council commissioned a study into the nature of the business environment and the level of support for entrepreneurs in the City of Whittlesea LGA. The key survey findings are:

- There needs to be more networks to support local entrepreneurs.
- There is a lack of business innovation clusters or precincts.
- There is a lack of co-working space.
- There is a low level of community-owned assets being made available for entrepreneurs.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Business

The economic impact of COVID-19 and the recovery pathways plays out spatially across our cities and regions. The impacts and recovery felt in Whittlesea will be quite different to the Melbourne CBD, regional Victoria or other states.

During May to June of 2021 Council conducted a survey of the local business community to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 on their operations and profitability.

The initial impact (i.e. during 2020) of COVID-19 on businesses was as follows:

- 75% experienced a loss of revenue
- 63% lost customers
- 38% reduced staff
- 31% had an increase in operational costs.

Examples of the challenges facing local businesses as the pandemic recovery unfolds include:

- Little prospect of an imminent return of major revenue streams.
- Clients are more price-sensitive and bad debts have increased.
- Access to an adequately skilled workforce.
- Maintaining a COVID-safe premises.
- Increased challenges for businesses just starting up.
- Lack of international travel.

One of the positives of the pandemic and resulting restrictions is that it has forced a 'resurgence' of local centres with people spending, staying, working and connecting locally.

WHAT COUNCIL HAS DONE

Council's Recent Activity

Council has successfully implemented a range of initiatives that each contribute to a Strong Local Economy. The list of achievements related to this strategy have been grouped below according to the new structure of employment, education and business.

Achievements on Employment

- Developed the Investment Prospectus and the City of Whittlesea's first Investment Attraction Plan to attract new businesses, support existing businesses to grow and create more local jobs.
- Launched the Explore Whittlesea website and social media channels to promote the City of Whittlesea as a tourist destination, highlighting the City's attractions, events and hospitality.
- Advocacy for a North and West City Deal.
- Achieved the Economic Development Strategy target of 10,000 new jobs.
- Procurement processes and Council's Local Supplier Database and Vendor panel.
- Planning scheme amendments to rezone land for major employment areas and activity centres.
- Establishment of the Priority Development Assessment planning application process.

Achievements on Education and Employment Pathways

- Supported the establishment of the Melbourne Polytechnic Food Incubator to support our growing food sector.
- Ongoing partnership with Whittlesea Youth Commitment and other service providers to support at risk young people.
- Partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic, Whittlesea Community Connections and Yarra Valley Water to investigate local food and farming opportunities.
- Partnership with Deakin University to define regenerative agricultural practices and produce best practice regenerative agriculture case studies.

Achievements on Business

- Established Business Advisory Panel to enable our business community to provide advice, insight and feedback to Council on key initiatives.
- Introduced the Business Concierge Service to streamline the permit approvals for small businesses.
- Launched the Whittlesea Localised online platform to encourage business-to-business engagement and transactions between local suppliers of goods and services.
- Delivery of the Ignite start-up program and series of events supporting start-ups and entrepreneurs.
- Delivery of the Business Pandemic and Recovery Support Programs including a \$450,000 Business Assistance and Resilience Grants Program for 103 businesses.
- Development and implementation of the Visitor Economy Marketing Plan and campaigns.
- Worked with the local business community to provide incentives and promotional support through shop local campaigns.
- Supported local businesses in response to the pandemic through educational webinars, shop local initiatives and business development programs.
- Designed and constructed streetscape improvements to Lalor Shops and Rochdale Square.
- Established the Vacant to Vibrant program, matching vacant shops with prospective business owners.
- Supported food and hospitality businesses through the State Government's Outdoor Eating and Entertainment program.
- Supported businesses financially through the Business Assistance Grants and Economic Development Community Grants programs.
- Partnership with Deakin University to investigate agricultural opportunities in the municipality through the production of a Land Capability Assessment.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section highlights the key challenges and opportunities that the Strong Local Economic Strategy can address. The highlights are based on a review of key documents, research and data.

Overview of the City of Whittlesea Economy

The City of Whittlesea is located in Melbourne's northern suburbs, about 20 kilometres from the Melbourne central business district. About 50,000 years before colonisation, a diversity of Wurundjeri people, families and communities managed the land that the City of Whittlesea now occupies. Today, 'scarred' river-red gum trees serve as a reminder that Aboriginal people have always been, and will always be, central to the social, economic and cultural prosperity of the City of Whittlesea. European settlement dates from 1837 with the area soon becoming a vital part of Melbourne's life, supplying food and water to its growing population.

Key indicators - 2020



Largest employing industries - 2020



Chart: .id - Source: NIEIR, 2020

The City of Whittlesea went through its first rapid growth phase during the 1960s, with the development of many suburbs at the southern end, notably Bundoora, Thomastown and Lalor. Significant development occurred in Epping in the 1980s and 1990s. Growth during the 1990s was largely in Blossom Park (the eastern part of Mill Park), Epping, Mill Park and South Morang.

Today, the City of Whittlesea is one of Melbourne's major population growth areas, with significant future growth expected. Its economy has transitioned from a producer of food to an economy focussed on household services and industrial activity. The rural areas of the City to the north are characterised by farming and grazing, but also support recreational activities and historic township communities.

In 2020, the City of Whittlesea was home to an estimated 236,539 residents. Population serving industries such as health, retail and education are the largest job providers. Manufacturing, transport and wholesale activities are also important drivers of growth and export activity. The strong population growth and industrial investment have fuelled construction activities over recent years.

The City of Whittlesea is home to several precincts defined by the State Government as 'state significant'. These are:

- Northern state significant industrial precinct
- Thomastown Industrial Area
- Cooper Street Employment Precinct
- Cooper Street West Employment Precinct (including Melbourne Wholesale Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Market and Waste and Resource Recovery Hub)
- Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre.

The City of Whittlesea economy is interlinked with the economies of Melbourne's Northern Region. The Northern Region generated almost \$50 billion in GRP in 2020 and supported over 380,000 jobs. While the City of Whittlesea plays an important residential role, it is the second largest economy in the Northern Region and the fastest growing. Its proximity to the La Trobe National Employment Cluster and Melbourne Airport provides local businesses with strong connections and collaboration opportunities with government agencies, researchers, tertiary education providers and businesses.

Gross Regional Product, 2019/20 Northern Region Councils

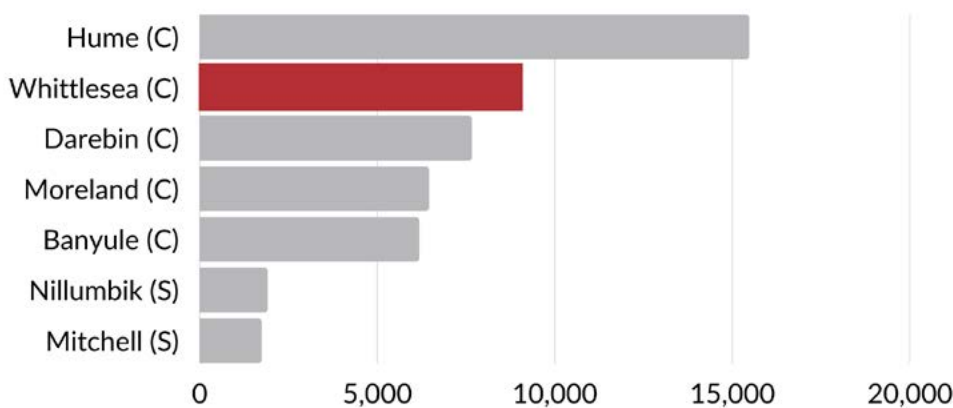


Chart: .id - Source: NIEIR, 2020

The City of Whittlesea is also well located to benefit from future investment in the Northern Region. The proposed Beveridge Interstate Freight Terminal (BIFT) is an important future economic asset for the region. The future Lockerbie Metropolitan Activity Centre will also be an important economic asset with around 60 hectares of land identified for commercial purposes. The proposed Outer Metropolitan Ring/E6 Transport Corridor (OMR) and North East Link are expected to further enhance connections within the region and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on the City of Whittlesea. The number of jobs in the City of Whittlesea fell by 3000 in the June quarter 2020. The City of Whittlesea's unemployment rate increased sharply during this period and has remained high since at 8.6% in March 2021. Industry impacts have been uneven, with hospitality, retail and arts and recreation the most impacted.

Comparative housing affordability and good transport links to inner Melbourne will continue to act as significant drivers for population growth in future years. The City of Whittlesea is projected to grow by more than 150,000 new residents by 2041, making it the third most populous LGA in Victoria.

Challenges

There are several challenges facing the economic development potential of the City of Whittlesea. These challenges have been informed by research as well as studies undertaken on behalf of Whittlesea Council. The challenges have been categorised based on their relevance to employment, education and business, to accord with the three key directions for the Strong Local Economy Strategy: increased local employment, education opportunities for all, and successful, innovative local businesses.

Employment

COVID-19

Like many areas in Australia, COVID-19 is having a significant impact on the City of Whittlesea economy. The number of jobs in the City of Whittlesea fell by 3000 in the June quarter 2020. The City of Whittlesea's unemployment rate increased sharply during this period and has remained high since, at 8.6% in March 2021. Industry impacts have been uneven, with hospitality, retail and arts and recreation the most impacted. The pandemic has also exacerbated the extent and impacts from pre-existing issues such as insecure employment, financial insecurity, increased isolation and domestic violence for many disadvantaged groups.

While the City of Whittlesea appears to be recovering from the June and September quarter falls in job numbers, there is still a possibility of further downturns in the coming quarters due to further COVID-19 outbreaks as well as national and global uncertainty.

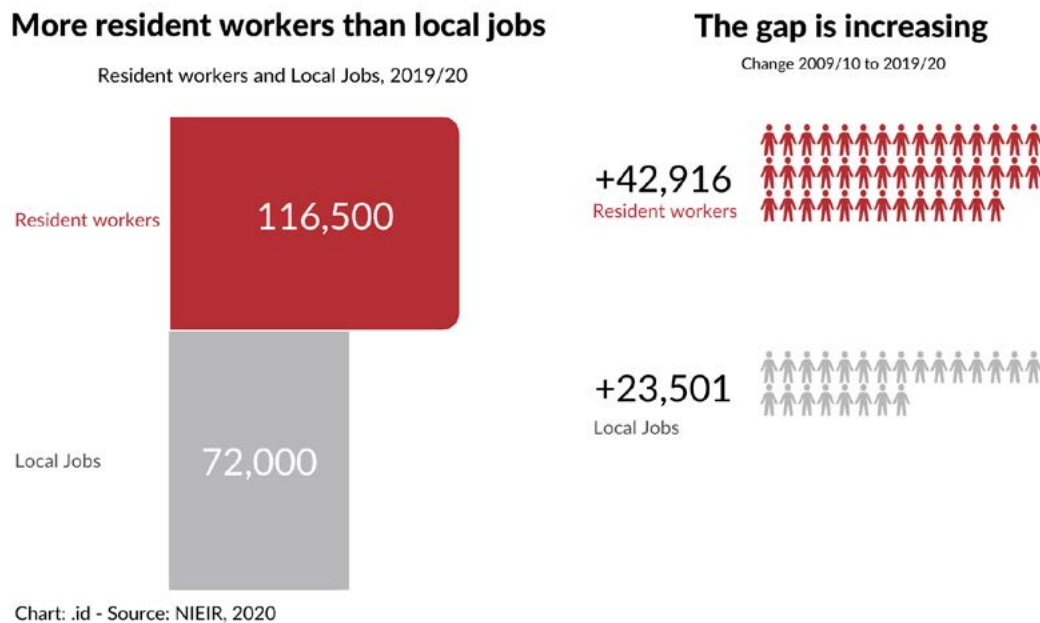
Alongside these immediate impacts, COVID-19 is expected to influence future economic growth in several ways. Some of these include:

- **Slower economic growth:** economic growth is likely to be slower than forecast due to a range of factors, including slower population growth.
- **Online shopping:** Australians are increasingly comfortable shopping online with 5.2 million households shopping online in January 2021, a 44% increase compared to the year before. In August 2020, Doreen was identified as the fifth largest online buying location in Australia. This accelerated trend may impact retail vacancy rates across the City of Whittlesea.

- **Remote working:** McKinsey analysis suggests 20 to 25% of the workforces in advanced economies could work from home between three and five days a week, and 60 to 75% of business services areas work could be done remotely. This trend could have a significant impact on the City of Whittlesea given the size of its commuter workforce. This increase in local workers could have positive impacts on local services such as cafés, restaurants, health, recreation and other services. An increase in remote working may also benefit the City of Whittlesea's large female workforce who are highly educated and unable to find equivalent work close to home.
- **Increased digitisation and automation:** Even before COVID-19, rapid advances in product development and service delivery were occurring via the increasing application of digital technology. History shows that the recovery period following economic downturns can accelerate the transition of industries or magnify the trends that were already occurring in the economy. To remain competitive, businesses and education providers in the City of Whittlesea will need to reskill and upskill workers to make the most of this digital transformation underway.
- **Supply chain disruption:** There have been major impacts on global supply chains with manufacturing delivery times increasing sharply. While supply chain challenges are expected to ease, the disruption has highlighted supply chain weaknesses with opportunities emerging for local manufacturing.
- **Business resilience and adaptability:** Many businesses have demonstrated resilience and adaptability in response to COVID-19. For example, 41% of Australian businesses surveyed by the ABS in April 2021 had changed the way they provide products and services, 39% changed suppliers and 31% changed the type and range of products or services. Supporting this resilience and adaptability will be important to drive business recovery in the City of Whittlesea
- **Nature-based/outdoor tourism:** The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded many of the benefits of travel and visitors are seeking outdoor experiences more than ever to compensate for extensive lockdowns.

Job growth is not keeping pace with residential growth

More people are choosing to live in the City of Whittlesea, but job growth is not keeping up. Unless the City of Whittlesea attracts more jobs, the gap between jobs and workers is forecast to grow.



Mismatch between resident skills and the jobs available in the City of Whittlesea

Related to the shortfall in jobs is the composition of who is leaving the City of Whittlesea every day for work. In 2016, 70% of residents worked outside the City of Whittlesea, higher than the growth area average. Many of these workers are highly skilled, seeking full-time and higher income jobs. Some workers are clearly trading off proximity for affordability or lifestyle, while others have no choice but to commute to access jobs that suit their qualifications.

The City of Whittlesea also attracts labour from a wide catchment. In 2016, around 50% of jobs were performed by other workers. A large share of these workers came from the Northern Region with many seeking job positions in the health, education, manufacturing, retail and construction industries. This highlights the importance of transport connections between the City of Whittlesea and Northern Region municipalities.

Many residents need to travel elsewhere for work

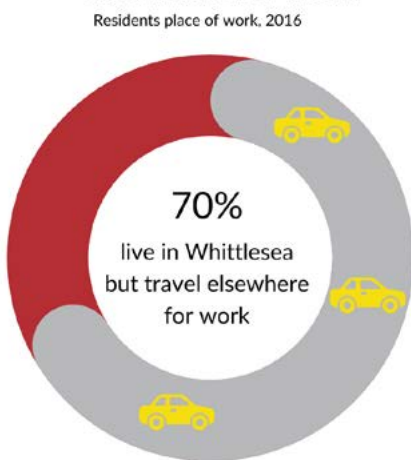
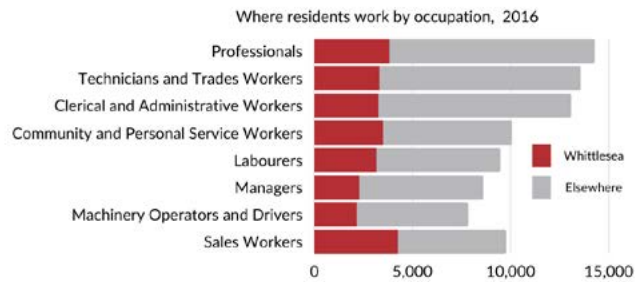


Chart: .id - Source: NIEIR, 2020

Mismatch across occupations



Large commuter population attracted to higher paying jobs



Commuter impacts

This shortfall in jobs and mismatch has added to the commuter population with around one in five resident workers travelling into inner Melbourne every day for work. According to SGS Economics and Planning, the separation of residential areas from employment, and limited access to public transport, means car dependency and relatively long trips for many residents. This also increases living costs for residents, eroding the housing affordability offered and contributes to the gender pay gap.

‘We found women trade their careers and financial independence for lower skilled/paid jobs close to home, to be available for caring responsibilities, and men trade their caring responsibilities and time with their families for long days with long commutes to maintain their careers’ – Gender Equity in Employment.

There are significant benefits to addressing this challenge in the City of Whittlesea, including travel time and financial savings, increased leisure time, reduced environmental impacts and increased daytime trade.

Uneven location of jobs across the City of Whittlesea

Spatially, jobs are concentrated in the southern area of the City of Whittlesea, especially in Thomastown and Epping. Most of the future population growth, however, is located to the north in Donnybrook, Wollert and Epping North. There will be a need to connect these future growth suburbs to existing employment precincts and future precincts such as Lockerbie.

Combined, the shortfall in jobs and location of jobs impacts on the ability to achieve 20-minute neighbourhoods. According to SGS Economics and Planning, the range of locations that the City of Whittlesea residents can access within 20 minutes is limited and uneven across the municipality. Growth areas to the north have the least '20 minute' access. The limited number of mixed-use precincts is cited as a reason behind this.

Education

Low education and skills...

Most future jobs are expected to require post-school qualifications with cognitive skills or non-routine work becoming increasingly important. Going forward, these jobs will become more and more important as they are difficult to automate, often requiring creativity, problem solving and/or human presence.

The City of Whittlesea currently has a large skills gap compared to Greater Melbourne. Improving the education and skill profile of residents is needed to meet the future requirements of work, as well as increasing the attractiveness of the City of Whittlesea to new businesses.

Skill gaps limits the potential

Compared to Greater Melbourne, people who live in the **City of Whittlesea** are less likely to



Chart: .id - Source: ABS, 2016






With implications for labour force outcomes



...But economic outcomes are mixed across the municipality

There are large spatial differences in terms of the socio-economic profile of residents in the City of Whittlesea. This means that the economic challenges vary from location to location. Established areas in the City of Whittlesea, like Thomastown, Lalor and Epping, are older, have lower incomes and are less skilled. These areas have a relatively high share of non-English speaking households and have a higher proportion of single parents which are more likely to be exposed to economic hardship. In contrast, growth areas, like Doreen and Mernda, are attracting a different demographic, with higher incomes and higher skill levels. These areas are located further away from highly skilled jobs. They also have a relatively large share of people who provide unpaid childcare.

Selected indicators by selected areas

		Doreen	Whittlesea Township & Surrounds	Bundoora	Epping	Lalor	Thomastown
Median age		31	40	34	34	36	38
Household income		\$1,801	\$1,314	\$1,276	\$1,273	\$1,102	\$1,020
University qualification		17.9%	10.2%	24.8%	14.1%	13.4%	12.7%
Language other than English		12.5%	6.0%	48.7%	43.7%	65.2%	68.2%
Labour force participation		73.9%	56.3%	57.3%	58.5%	49.2%	47.9%
Unemployment rate		5.1%	3.8%	9.3%	8.8%	9.5%	10.1%

Barriers to higher participation

In addition to the skill profile challenge, research has also identified that there are several vulnerable groups that face barriers to higher participation rates. Five target populations who do not have equal access to employment or pathways to employment have been identified. They are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Cultural and linguistically diverse people, including refugees, asylum seekers and international students
- People living with disability
- Women
- Young people.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Unemployment Rate (11.7%) higher than City of Whittlesea average (7.2%)



Culturally and linguistically diverse people

44% of people spoke a language other than English at home, well above the Greater Melbourne average (32%).

Over 1 in every 2 (52%) of unemployed people in Whittlesea speak a language other than English at home.



People with a disability

In Whittlesea, working-age people with a disability are 2.4 times more likely to be unemployed (17%) than people without a disability (7.2%)



Young People

Youth disengagement (not earning or learning) in Whittlesea is 1.3 times greater than in Greater Melbourne



Women

The gender pay gap in the Whittlesea Region* was -16.3% in 2017/18, above the Greater Melbourne pay gap (14.3%).

Compared to men in Whittlesea, women are more likely to be unemployed, work part-time, earn less with a tertiary education, undertake unpaid childcare and rely on jobs closer to home.

(Gender Equity in Employment Project Report 2018-2020)

* based on the Whittlesea-Wallan SA3

Chart: .id - Source: ABS

The pandemic has also exacerbated pre-existing issues for many of these disadvantaged groups. These issues included insecure employment, financial insecurity, increased isolation and domestic violence (SGS W2040 COVID Impacts 2021 Assessment).

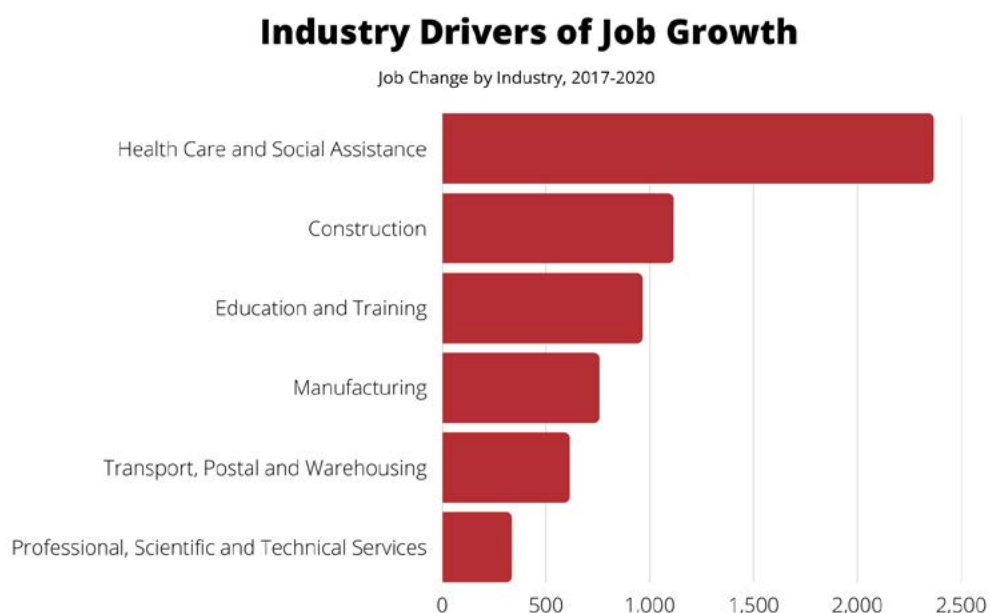
Businesses

Need to diversify the industry base

It is no surprise then that the City of Whittlesea's local jobs market is primarily focused on the provision of household services such as health, construction and retail. In 2019/20, nearly 41% of local employment was in these three industries, compared to 31% in Greater Melbourne.

The City of Whittlesea's largest industries are also among the fastest growing. Over the last decade, construction, retail and education grew considerably due to population growth. Health care and social assistance services growth was linked to overall growth but also the ageing population and NDIS. The City of Whittlesea's industrial sector has also expanded significantly with many businesses moving from inner and middle Melbourne to take advantage of the City of Whittlesea's transport connections and affordable employment land. The major drivers of recent growth were manufacturing (food and furniture), wholesale trade (Melbourne Markets) and transport (road freight and couriers). Projects that enhance these competitive strengths should be encouraged.

However, business services (which includes architects, engineers, tax professionals, accountants, lawyers and computer programmers) are under-represented in the City of Whittlesea compared to Greater Melbourne. An ongoing employment growth challenge for the City of Whittlesea will be increasing its share of business service jobs given their tendency to cluster in inner Melbourne. There are promising signs, however, with professional, scientific and technical services emerging as the sixth largest growing industry in the City of Whittlesea between 2017 and 2020. The potential shift to remote work may also provide opportunities to encourage residents to work closer at home or closer to home. Arts and recreation jobs are also under-represented compared to Greater Melbourne and similar growth area LGAs.



Specialisations

Compared to Greater Melbourne, Whittlesea has a **comparative advantage** in

Manufacturing
Construction
Health Care and Social Assistance
Agriculture
Wholesale Trade
Retail Trade

But a **comparative disadvantage** in

Business Services (1)
Arts and Recreation Services

1 Business services include Financial and Insurance Services, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, Information Media and Telecommunications, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services, Administrative and Support Services

Enabling transformation of sectors undergoing transition

Technological and consumer-based change places some industries at risk of further job losses, especially manufacturing, retail trade and agriculture. This trend has been accelerated recently by COVID-19. Support needs to be given to these industries to address their changing human capital, technology and land use needs.

Enhancing local entrepreneurial culture and generating more high growth businesses

In the City of Whittlesea, around half of workers are employed by small businesses (less than 20 employees) with many of them non-employing.

Hume, Casey and Wyndham are outperforming the City of Whittlesea in generating a greater number of employing businesses each year. The City of Whittlesea has experienced much slower growth in micro businesses with 1-4 employees and larger businesses with more than 200 employees. These trends suggest there is a need to enhance the local entrepreneurial culture and generate more high growth businesses.

Climate change

The City of Whittlesea's climate has already changed and will continue to change. According to the City of Whittlesea's Climate Change Projections and Scenarios Report for the Climate Change Action Plan (City of Whittlesea, 2021b), the City of Whittlesea will face rising temperatures, more frequent, intense and longer heatwaves, decline in rainfall and harsher fire weather, long fire season, and more fire danger days.

These changes will have impacts on business productivity, production costs and equipment damage. The industries identified as more exposed to these climate change impacts in the City of Whittlesea include health and social services, manufacturing, construction and agriculture¹.

Whittlesea's Green Wedge, water bodies and built infrastructure have been identified as more exposed to climate change risk/impacts in the City of Whittlesea. Anticipated hazards include decreased value of ecosystem services and agricultural activities, reduced service delivery, increased maintenance and repair costs, and disruption of water flow, transport networks and utilities.

¹ The City of Whittlesea (2021). Draft Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment. Draft Municipal Context Package Paper No. 9 for the City of Whittlesea Climate Change Action Plan

Opportunities

Despite the challenges above, the City of Whittlesea is changing rapidly with many emerging opportunities. Its competitive strengths include:

- growing population and skills
- relatively large tertiary education sector
- emerging employment precincts such as Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre
- key industries – health, food wholesaling, food processing, utilities, construction, tertiary education, freight and logistics and retail (Investment Attraction Plan)
- transport network including Hume Freeway, Metropolitan Ring Road, CityLink and other major road networks provide access to the CBD, Melbourne Airport, the docks and rail freight terminals
- diverse natural, cultural and landscape values with tourism potential.

Growing population and skills

Population growth has been a major driver of the City of Whittlesea's economy over the past decade. Over this period, the City of Whittlesea's population grew by 4.5% per year, well above Greater Melbourne's growth rate of 2.3%. This growth has increased local expenditure, driving demand for local services such as doctors, nurses, childcare workers, shop assistants, teachers and baristas.

This population growth has also helped increase the skills profile in the City of Whittlesea. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of residents with a bachelor or higher degree increased by 64% (+8,530). This growth was faster than the Greater Melbourne average. A large share of this skills growth occurred in growth areas such as Epping North, Wollert, Mernda and Doreen. Bundoora, Lalor and South Morang also experienced a large increase in the proportion of residents with a bachelor or higher degree.

Population growth and skills are set to continue with the population forecast to grow by 150,000 people by 2040 to reach 388,000 people.

A strong education base to build on

The City of Whittlesea has a relatively high share of tertiary education jobs compared to other growth areas in Greater Melbourne. In 2019/20, the City of Whittlesea was home to 1,213 tertiary education jobs; well above Hume (487), Casey (363) and Wyndham (620). This raised level is explained by the institutional presence of RMIT and Melbourne Polytechnic. The City of Whittlesea also benefits from proximity to La Trobe University (Bundoora).

The presence of two major universities in the region plays a significant role in preparing residents in the City of Whittlesea for work in the knowledge economy as well as addressing the additional reskilling and retraining requirements from COVID-19.

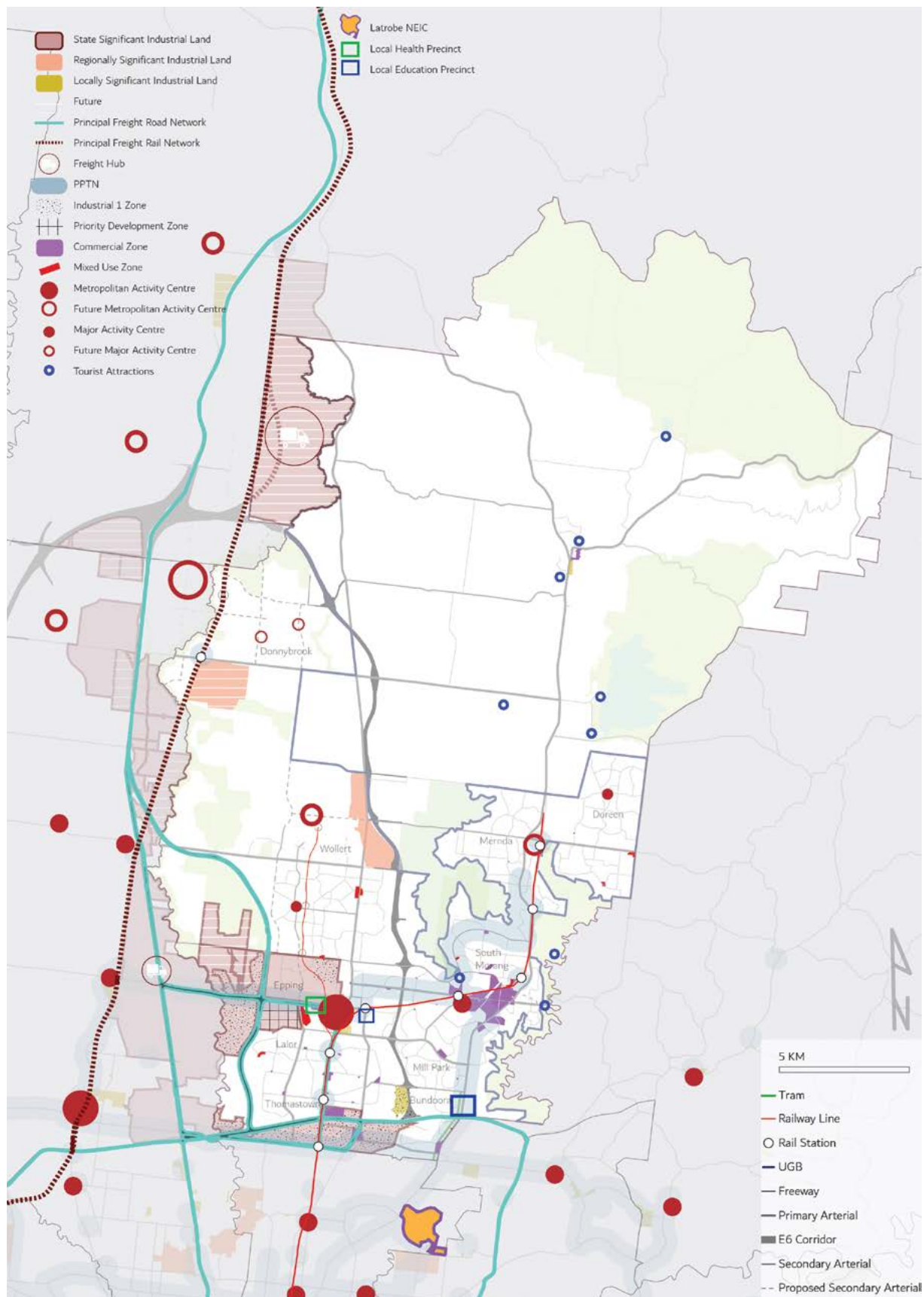
Emerging employment precincts

The City of Whittlesea contains four strategic employment precincts: Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre, Cooper Street Employment Area, Thomastown Industrial Area and RMIT/University Hill. Around 50% of the City of Whittlesea's jobs are located within these employment precincts. It is where businesses, institutions and workers concentrate around infrastructure with connections to residential areas. The strategic employment precincts are also home to industry-specific clusters of activity such as health care in the Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre, tertiary education in RMIT/University Hill, wholesale trade in the Cooper Street Employment Area and Cooper Street West Employment Precinct (including Melbourne Wholesale Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Market and Cooper Street West Waste and Resource Recovery Hub).

Several future employment precincts have also been identified within the Northern Growth Corridor including Lockerbie Metropolitan Activity Centre, the proposed Beveridge Interstate Freight Terminal (BIFT) and future expansion of the Northern State Significant Industrial Precinct along the Hume Freeway. Wollert and Mernda have also been identified as regionally significant future employment precincts.

There is also significant investment planned for the Northern Region including the proposed Outer Metropolitan Ring/E6 Transport Corridor (OMR), North East Link, Wollert Rail and Wallan Rail Electrification. This investment in infrastructure is expected to significantly improve the economic performance of employment precincts in the City of Whittlesea and the Northern Region.

Local employment areas map



The challenge for the City of Whittlesea will be to build and grow these employment precincts to attract a greater share of higher order services and skilled workers. Drivers for success include:

Strong Local Economy



- Ensure an adequate supply of employment land
- Address the low education profile of its labour force catchment
- Increase the share of higher order services, professional services and knowledge workers
- Attract sufficient investment from government to seed development of higher order services
- Develop innovation systems and business networking opportunities

Sustainable Environment



- Shared/open access infrastructure to reduce costs
- Public transport connections to reduce pollution from journey to work movements

Connected Community



- Improve connections to Whittlesea's (and broader region) growing residential base.
- Improve connections from surrounding employment precincts to Whittlesea's growing residential base

Liveable Neighbourhoods



- Develop amenity (built and natural) and social infrastructure to generate competitive outcomes for businesses and workers
- Activate the night-time economy and cultural options
- Smart technology to improve attractiveness of precincts (e.g. improved access and parking)

Taking advantage of these opportunities will be central to maximising the potential of the City of Whittlesea's strategic employment precincts. The increase in remote working in response to COVID-19 may provide another avenue to increase the share of knowledge workers in the City of Whittlesea's employment precincts (e.g. shared workspace facilities, business relocation).

The City of Whittlesea's specialisations and comparative advantage can drive future growth

Specialisations are important as this is what makes the City of Whittlesea's economy unique and where investment can work with the market to drive future growth. The following sectors have been identified in the Investment Attraction Plan and .id's economic analysis as specialised (or on the cusp of becoming specialised):

- Health care and social assistance
- Wholesale trade (including Melbourne Market – fresh food wholesale trade)
- Manufacturing (including food manufacturing)
- Electricity, gas, water and waste services (including waste recycling services)
- Construction
- Education and training (including tertiary education)
- Transport, postal and warehousing
- Retail trade.

There are also several projects and partnerships which will have a direct impact on jobs in the City of Whittlesea including the Melbourne Innovation and Food Export Hub (MFIH) in Epping.

Leveraging infrastructure investment

Major infrastructure projects have been identified for Melbourne's north and west and if approved would deliver an unprecedented level of investment in the region. Major projects committed or identified include Melbourne Airport Rail Link, North East Link, Suburban Rail Loop, Melbourne Metro 2, the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal, Wollert Rail, Wallan Rail Electrification and the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road/E6. This investment in infrastructure is expected to significantly improve the economic performance of Melbourne's north and west, providing multiplier opportunities for the City of Whittlesea.

Multicultural community can support innovation

The City of Whittlesea has a highly multicultural resident base. In 2016, 35.5% of residents stated they were born overseas and 44% spoke a language other than English at home. This compares with 33.8% and 32% for Greater Melbourne.

Recent arrivals to the City of Whittlesea are also highly skilled. In 2016, 46% of recent overseas arrivals in the City of Whittlesea had a tertiary education, well above the City of Whittlesea average (28%).

This cultural diversity has the potential to generate a range of economic benefits such as new product development and innovation, new export links and induced visitation and expenditure.

Agriculture

Today, agriculture generates \$51 million in economic activity (value added) and accounts for almost 0.7% of output. Although agriculture is relatively small in employment terms (accounting for 1.1% of jobs), its proportion is 1.4 times larger than the Greater Melbourne average. In 2015/16, the largest commodity produced was mushrooms, which accounted for 91% of the City of Whittlesea's total agricultural output. Around 84% of Victoria's mushrooms come from the City of Whittlesea.

A range of agribusiness-related opportunities have been identified to take advantage of the region's productive and viable farming land, proximity to major regional transport and infrastructure and access to recycled water. These opportunities include an Export and Innovation Food Hub, Epping Food and Kitchen Incubator, Agri-tourism and improved networks between education providers and agricultural businesses.

Diverse natural, cultural and landscape values

The City of Whittlesea has several rural, nature-based, heritage and recreational assets which provide tourism potential. There are already a range of tourism offers including cellar doors, cafés and restaurants, wildlife, tourism destinations (e.g. Funfields) and events such as the Whittlesea Country Music Festival and Whittlesea Agricultural Show.

The visitor economy in the City of Whittlesea has potential but is underdeveloped. In 2020, the visitor economy generated around 1.2% of jobs in the City of Whittlesea, well below the Victorian average of 4.6%.

Future drivers influencing economic development in Whittlesea

The immediate challenge will be the economic recovery from the COVID-19 recession. Other forces influencing future growth include:

Forces	Implications
Rise of knowledge workers	Most jobs increasingly have a need for more cognitive skills and/or rely on non-routine work. Going forward, these jobs will become more and more important as they are difficult to automate, often requiring creativity, problem-solving and/or human presence e.g. childcare. Improving the education attainment rates and qualification levels of the local resident base is a key mechanism for lifting participation and employment levels, as well as increasing that attractiveness of the LGA to new businesses.
Forces of agglomeration	The shift to knowledge jobs has also led to a substantial shift in the geography of jobs, with a concentration of a disproportionate share of economic activity in a handful of economic regions with strong job density. In Melbourne, the benefits of agglomeration have favoured inner city locations supported by its rich public transport network and local amenity. The development of successful employment precincts will be critical to the economic development potential of Whittlesea.
Increasing adaption of digital technologies	Rapid advances in product development and service delivery are occurring via the increasing application of digital technology. Increased internet capacity and accessibility is generating new markets and changing the way we consume. Artificial intelligence, machine learning and the Internet of Things are part of the next wave and will see the automation of many processes but also provide us with increasing capabilities to manage our cities and environments.
Online shopping	Retail offer will evolve with changing consumer preferences and disruption from online shopping which has accelerated as a result of COVID-19. This trend is already impacting activity centres with a shift to food, lifestyle, health and wellness away from apparel and household goods.
Investment, innovation, start-ups and co-working spaces	In the past decade, there has been exceptionally high growth in the number of small, largely tech-based, entrepreneurial businesses seeking to grow rapidly by utilising opportunities provided by new organisation designs that support innovation, digital applications, decreased barriers to entry, abundance of skilled labour, and where available, supply of low rent office space. Recent growth in business services in the City of Whittlesea, combined with the rise of remote work, may provide opportunities for more residents to work closer to home.

Future drivers influencing economic development in Whittlesea (cont)

Forces	Implications
Circular economy, green economy and climate change	<p>The transition to a clean economy is strengthening across Australia. Calls for action are likely to see governments dedicate significant money towards innovative climate solutions that produce clean energy, reduce emissions and waste. The Victorian State Government has already implemented policies related to renewable energy and waste and recycling. This includes the four-year Recycling Victoria policy, which will invest more than \$300 million into the state's waste and recovery sector. This is expected to drive investment into world-class infrastructure and technology, create cutting-edge local industries and support 3900 new local jobs. The City of Whittlesea can play an important role in helping Victoria's transition to a clean economy and attract government funding by building on opportunities created by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Cooper Street West Waste and Resource Recovery Hub; • its existing strengths in advanced manufacturing, and education and training, and food production and processing; and • local government leadership, including the City of Whittlesea's commitment to zero net emissions by 2022. <p>These strengths, combined with state government investment, will provide opportunities for new job creation in Whittlesea and drive local investment in technology, resource efficiency and adoption of low emissions.</p>
A Community Wealth Building approach to economic development	<p>Economic development in Australia continues to evolve. The Community Wealth Building approach to economic development is growing in popularity in the USA and UK and has recently been adopted by the City of Sydney. This model aims to deliver a fairer and more sustainable outcome by attempting to redirect wealth back into the local economy and place control in the hands of local people.</p> <p>The Centre for Local Economic Strategies has summarised this approach into five pillars:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Socially progressive procurement of goods and services by large, anchor institutions. 2. Positive employment practices by anchor institutions to provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups within the community. 3. Using land owned by anchor institutions to support economic and social goals. 4. Harnessing wealth and savings for local community and economic benefit. 5. Encourage a diversity in business ownership. <p>These principles have been considered and implemented where appropriate in the objectives and actions following.</p>

PLANNING FOR A STRONG LOCAL ECONOMY

Goal 3: A Strong Local Economy

"In 2040 the City of Whittlesea is the smart choice for innovation, business growth and industry investment. People of all ages have opportunities to learn and develop skills locally. There are many opportunities to gain employment and build careers not too far from home. Residents support local business, and we are renowned for our successful local economy."



Key Direction 1: Increased local employment

Objective 1.1: There is an increase in the number of jobs in the City of Whittlesea local government area to reflect the growing population.

What is the current situation?

In 2021 the City of Whittlesea currently had an estimated jobs deficit of 44,000 to meet the needs of the local working population. The residential growth rate has outstripped the local employment growth rate (5% vs 3.5%). This results in residents commuting long distances to work.

What do we want?

The local jobs deficit is gradually reduced until there are sufficient jobs within the City of Whittlesea local government area to match the size of the local working resident population.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027, the City of Whittlesea local government area will attract many new businesses to the area and the jobs growth rate will match the residential growth rate.

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- More businesses are aware of the City of Whittlesea's strengths
- More businesses shortlist the City of Whittlesea as one of their location options
- The City of Whittlesea offers prospective businesses competitive packages
- More existing businesses are highly satisfied with their experience of being in the City of Whittlesea.

What are the lead indicators?

- Number of businesses in the City of Whittlesea
- Number of jobs in the City of Whittlesea
- Unemployment rate in the City of Whittlesea
- Development approvals (\$).

What is Council's role?

- Develop clear and consistent messaging on Whittlesea's strengths as a council and as a place for business and investments
- Businesses seeking to invest are assigned case managers to work closely with them throughout their expansion and/or relocation process
- Build on and strengthen relationships with commercial agents who can introduce prospective businesses seeking a new location
- Establish an advisory panel comprising senior business leaders to provide suggestions and industry perspectives on development and implementation of growth strategies, and/or structure plans.

How will we measure Council's performance?

- Number of first-time enquiries from prospective investors and/or businesses
- Number of prospective investors and/or businesses that shortlist Whittlesea as a location option
- Evaluation by local businesses on Whittlesea's level of business incentives/grants (measured by annual business sentiment survey)
- Satisfaction levels of newly relocated businesses/organisations (as measured by post occupancy check-ins and/or surveys)
- Satisfaction levels of local businesses (as measured by annual business sentiment surveys).

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea, *Investment Attraction Plan 2021-2026*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Investment Prospectus: The right place for business 2021*
- City of Whittlesea Planning Scheme
- NORTH Link 2015, *The Future Workforce: Melbourne's North*
- NORTH Link 2020, *North & West Melbourne City Deal Plan 2020-2040*
- Victoria State Government 2020, *Melbourne Industrial and Commercial Land Use Plan*
- Victoria State Government, *Draft Northern Metro Land Use Framework Plan*

Objective 1.2: Target population groups in the City of Whittlesea that do not have equal access can increasingly participate in the economy.

What is the current situation?

Five target populations have been identified who do not have equal access to employment or pathways to employment. They are: (1) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, (2) Cultural and linguistically diverse people, including refugees, asylum seekers and international students, (3) People living with disability, (4) Women and (5) Young people.

What do we want?

We want to see the economic participation rates of target population groups within the City of Whittlesea to improve.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027 target population groups will exhibit higher rates of employment, higher rates of local employment, higher rates of education, higher rates of representation and higher rates of business ownership (Source: ABS).

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- The specific barriers to economic participation of targeted population groups need to be better understood so they can be addressed
- The types of jobs attracted to the local area will more closely align to the skills of target population groups
- Large local employers need to adopt more progressive employment policies to address localised economic participation issues
- Supportive land use planning controls that encourage home-based businesses and working from, or near, home
- Educational opportunities that match local employment opportunities.

What are the lead indicators?

- Employment rates in target population groups
- Incomes in target population groups
- Education rates in target population groups
- Business ownership rates in target population groups.

What is Council's role?

- Monitor the needs and economic participation rates of target population groups
- Encourage investment attraction that provides jobs to match the occupations and/or skills of residents
- Encourage entrepreneurship and education opportunities in target population groups
- Provide information on setting up a home office of home-based business
- Support provision of co-working at Council, community, and private facilities
- Provide disaggregated data to monitor gender imbalances.

How do we measure Council's performance?

- Annual reports reviewing the economic participation rates of target population groups within the City of Whittlesea with gender breakdowns
- Delivery of successful programs to encourage entrepreneurs including programs specifically for target population groups.

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2015, *Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy*
- City of Whittlesea 2018, *Gender Equity in Employment Project Report 2018-2020*
- City of Whittlesea, *Investment Attraction Plan 2021-2026*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Strengthening the Local Economy by Expanding Economic Participation 2021*

Objective 1.3: Job seekers can access the employment services or financial advice they need.

What is the current situation?

In the 2021 March quarter, the unemployment rate in the City of Whittlesea was 8.5%. This is higher than the average for Victoria.

What do we want?

The unemployment rate in the City of Whittlesea is equal to or below the average for Victoria and target population groups equal access to employment opportunities.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027 the unemployment rate in the City of Whittlesea local government area will be equal to or below the average for Victoria (Source: ID Economy).

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- Job seekers are aware of job service agencies
- Job services agencies are aware of local job opportunities
- There is close collaboration between industry and job agencies.

What are the lead indicators?

- Unemployment rate
- Case load of local job service agencies.

What is Council's role?

- Establish and maintain relationships/partnerships with a wide range of key stakeholders, including but not limited to government agencies, community organisations and education and training providers
- Develop and implement the strategic economic participation framework including understanding and delivering to jobseeker and employer needs, developing and managing partnerships
- Support the effective delivery of key government or partnership programs and initiatives as they arise
- Work with Council's Procurement department to progress social procurement outcomes.

How do we measure Council's performance?

- Customer service staff are trained with knowledge of local job service agencies and financial counsellors
- Monitor the number of referrals by staff to these services.

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2020, *Financial Vulnerability Advocacy and Action Plan 2020-2022*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Strengthening the Local Economy by Expanding Economic Participation 2021*

Key Direction 2: Education opportunities for all

Objective 2.1: All residents in the City of Whittlesea can access excellent libraries and educational services that cater for people of all backgrounds and stages of life.

What is the current situation?

The City of Whittlesea is a new growth area whereby infrastructure is needed to accommodate a rising population with diverse needs. There is a higher proportion of people aged 0-9 and 30-39 in the City of Whittlesea compared to Victoria, highlighting the need for early learning services. In 2016, 14,574 non-English speakers in the City of Whittlesea reported difficulty speaking English.

What do we want?

The City of Whittlesea will be well supported by excellent libraries and educational services that respond to community needs, such as English language, youth and arts programs. Residents in the City of Whittlesea will not be hindered in any way by lack of education to live productive lives and to fully participate in the broader community regardless of their background.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027, the City of Whittlesea will have industry leading libraries, community education providers, and arts and cultural services to meet the demands of our fast-growing population – particularly young families and people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- Ensure there is adequate resourcing and planning for libraries, neighbourhood houses and learning centres in growth areas
- There needs to be close monitoring of population numbers and demographics to adequately forecast the level of need
- Strong collaboration with major institutions to address skills shortages
- Affordable and accessible English training providers
- Lands need to be appropriately zoned for future education purposes.

What are the lead indicators?

- Population numbers and ages
- Rates of different demographic groups enrolled in education
- Proficiency in English language skills

What is Council's role?

- Maximise the use of local libraries, neighbourhood houses and learning centres (and other suitable Council premises) for community education and utilise other Council assets for community learning opportunities
- Monitor the level of need with residents, industry groups and other key stakeholders
- Partner with education providers and co-promote their services
- Deliver a range of youth programs aimed at development and engagement
- Provision of facilities and programs that support arts and culture.

How do we measure Council's performance?

- Ongoing monitoring and publishing of demographic trends and needs
- Conducting community surveys to monitor satisfaction levels with Council-supported programs and services.

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2017, *Lifelong Learning Policy 2017*
- City of Whittlesea 2018, *What our community wants for the future*
- City of Whittlesea 2018, *Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All*

Objective 2.2: Businesses in the City of Whittlesea can access talented staff from within the local community.

What is the current situation?

Compared to the average for Victoria, the residential population of the City of Whittlesea local government area has a lower proportion of degrees, an equivalent level of diplomas and a higher level of vocational training qualifications.

What do we want?

We want to see residents being highly skilled and adaptable to meet the needs of the workplace in the future with a particular focus on apprenticeships and traineeships. This will support business to become more innovative and improve productivity.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027, the City of Whittlesea will have a level of qualification and training that is equal to or above the average for Victoria.

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- The residential population needs to be aware of emerging opportunities and be able to access appropriate training and educational opportunities
- Local education and training providers need to be aware of emerging industries and skills shortages and have relevant training programs available
- Businesses need to have the confidence to invest in human capital and informal education of staff
- Industry needs to communicate their workforce training needs to local education providers

What are the lead indicators?

- Local workforce education levels across degrees, diplomas and vocational training
- Track identified and emerging skills gaps
- Monitoring the degree to which residents are 'lifelong learners' via survey
- Feedback from businesses and training providers.

What is Council's role?

- To monitor education and training trends in the community
- To collaborate and share knowledge with education providers and industry
- To facilitate careers and training expos (if necessary)
- To advocate for education investment and program delivery (where necessary).

How do we measure Council's performance?

- Conduct annual education level assessments of residents
- Regularly meet with education providers and industry representatives
- Advocate to other levels of government.

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2017, *Lifelong Learning Policy 2017*
- NORTH Link 2015, *The Future Workforce: Melbourne's North*

Objective 2.3: The City of Whittlesea has a high rate of residents engaging in tertiary education.

What is the current situation?

The residential population in the City of Whittlesea has a lower level of university degree qualifications than the average for Victoria. This is a disadvantage to the City of Whittlesea in terms of accessing a highly skilled, professional workforce.

What do we want?

We want to see a higher proportion of the residential population of Whittlesea enrolled in university education so that they can access a wider spectrum of jobs, and local businesses can access local staff for senior positions.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027, the City of Whittlesea will have reduced the gap in degree qualified residents compared to the average for Victoria.

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- An increasing level of residents need to be enrolled in tertiary education
- Potential students need easy access to, and information on, tertiary education programs
- The range of barriers to higher education for different disadvantaged groups is identified, understood and addressed
- Monitoring of skills shortfalls and the future needs of emerging growth industries.

What are the lead indicators?

- Target population group enrolments in tertiary education courses
- Level of diploma, advanced diploma and degree qualification levels in target population groups
- Local resident numbers in year 12.

What is Council's role?

- To track university enrolment and degree qualification rates of the residential population
- To work closely with local high schools and universities to understand local needs
- To encourage collaboration between local industry and universities
- To advocate on behalf of the community (where necessary).

How do we measure Council's performance?

- Maintaining accurate information on education rates in the community
- Number of meetings with local education providers
- Advocating and planning for new university satellite campuses (where appropriate).

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2017, *Lifelong Learning Policy 2017*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Strengthening the Local Economy by Expanding Economic Participation 2021*
- NORTH Link 2015, *The Future Workforce: Melbourne's North*
- NORTH Link 2020, *North & West Melbourne City Deal Plan 2020-2040*

Key Direction 3: Successful, innovative local businesses

Objective 3.1: The City of Whittlesea is both a more productive and circular economy through the adoption of new technology.

What is the current situation?

The City of Whittlesea's gross regional product (GRP) was \$9,086 million as of 30 June 2020. The municipality has a strong average growth rate of 4.0% per year.

What do we want?

We want to maintain a strong level of economic growth that is more environmentally sustainable. This growth will need to come from productivity gains of local business through the adoption of new technology and increased/new investment in emerging opportunity sectors.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027, the City of Whittlesea will maintain its strong average level of GDP growth at 4.0% per annum but levels of waste, including CO₂ emissions, per capita will reduce.

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- A competitive business environment whereby businesses have easy access to suppliers and professional networks
- The local government area is 'open for business' with a distinct business identity and vision for the future
- Businesses are encouraged to adopt sustainable business practices and new technology to their operations to reduce their level of waste.

What are the lead indicators?

- GRP growth rates
- Levels of waste including hard waste and CO₂ emissions.

What is Council's role?

- Lead by example in the adoption of circular economy principles and new technology
- Monitor and respond to the needs of businesses
- Monitor and advocate for improved NBN and mobile phone coverage
- Encourage the development of strong business networks and industry leader/mentor programs.

How do we measure Council's performance?

- Updated land use planning controls and infrastructure plans
- Monitor the frequency and satisfaction levels regarding Council's communications with business owners
- Review Council's own actions regarding the adoption of the new technology.

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2017, *Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021: Growing our economy together*
- City of Whittlesea 2011, *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021* (currently under review)
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Investment Prospectus: The right place for business 2021*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Rethinking Waste Plan 2021-2030*

Objective 3.2: The City of Whittlesea encourages a diverse and sustainable economy base by supporting current and future small business owners.

What is the current situation?

In 2020 the City of Whittlesea had 17,297 local businesses. The construction industry had the largest number of total registered businesses in the City of Whittlesea, comprising 23.2% of all total registered businesses.

What do we want?

To support our existing businesses to further invest and grow. We also want to support new businesses and entrepreneurial activity and explore opportunities in emerging industries such as the green economy.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027, the City of Whittlesea will have 7000 additional businesses and a supportive environment for new business owners. We want to support emerging sectors such as the green economy.

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- Supportive professional networks, programs, infrastructure, finance and supply chains to support small business owners
- Local business owners need to be supported by the local community
- There needs to be a business-friendly approach by Council with good information and customer service.

What are the lead indicators?

- Number of businesses within Whittlesea local government area
- Amount of co-working space within the Whittlesea local government area
- Membership in local business groups and professional associations.

What is Council's role?

- Provide information on emerging industries and growth opportunities
- To support and (at times) deliver small business programs to the community
- Have clear guidelines and factsheets for people looking to start a small business, or a home business
- To work closely with local business groups and stakeholders.

How do we measure Council's performance?

- Improved and targeted communication to different business and community groups
- Number and satisfaction rates of small business programs delivered or supported by Council
- Number of events, forums and engagement opportunities with business and industry representative groups
- Improving customer satisfaction via average resolution times and customer service scores.

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Investment Attraction Plan 2021-2026*
- City of Whittlesea 2020, *COVID-19 Business Impact Survey Final Report Nov 2020*
- City of Whittlesea 2017, *Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021: Growing our economy together*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Economic Development Strategy Review May 2021*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Thrive Social Enterprise Benchmarking Project: Final Report July 2021*

Objective 3.3: The City of Whittlesea has a range of thriving and sustainable business precincts that are valued by the local community.

What is the current situation?

The City of Whittlesea is comprised of a range of business areas from local neighbourhood centres to major industrial sites. Each of these different business precincts require different planning and investment decisions to support their growth and success.

What do we want?

We want a variety of thriving and sustainable business precincts in the City of Whittlesea so that we can have a strong, diverse and resilient economy with a wide range of employment opportunities.

What does success look like?

Our intention is that by 2027, our town and neighbourhood centres and industrial areas will be vibrant, high-performing and sustainable business areas that support a growing local economy. We want to support the earlier delivery of activity centres in growth areas to support provision of goods, services, and employment opportunities for the new residents.

What needs to happen to achieve this?

- Land use planning controls to balance employment growth whilst protecting encroachment from sensitive uses and conversion to other uses
- Businesses precincts and operations are managed in such a way as to reduce waste and CO₂ emissions
- Necessary infrastructure and services provision
- Precinct activation and revitalisation of existing precincts.

What are the lead indicators?

- Vacancy rates in commercial and industrial areas
- Localised waste measurements including CO₂ emissions
- Business numbers across industry sectors and locations
- NBN and mobile phone coverage.

What is Council's role?

- Allocation of budget towards infrastructure and public domain works to improve employment lands and their surrounding areas
- Provide waste management services and explore circular economy opportunities
- Encourage residents to support local businesses through promotion and buy-local campaigns
- Continue to monitor land use planning needs and trends
- Monitor and advocate for improved NBN and mobile phone coverage.

How do we measure Council's performance?

- An updated public realm improvement program
- Conducting a regular business survey to monitor needs and issues as they arise.

Guiding documents:

- City of Whittlesea 2011, *Green Wedge Management Plan 2011-2021*
- City of Whittlesea 2012, *Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2012-2022*
- City of Whittlesea 2016, *Road and Public Transport Plan: Responding to the challenges of travel and transport in the City of Whittlesea*
- City of Whittlesea 2020, *COVID-19 Business Impact Survey Final Report Nov 2020*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Investment Attraction Plan 2021-2026*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Investment Prospectus: The right place for business 2021*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Municipal Pandemic Readiness and Recovery Plan*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Proposed Community Plan 2021-2025*
- City of Whittlesea 2021, *Rethinking Waste Plan 2021-2030*
- Victoria State Government 2019, *Cooper Street Waste and Resource Recovery Hub Plan*

FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION

How to provide feedback

The Hive

To provide feedback on the Strong Local Economy Discussion Paper, visit the project webpage.

<https://engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/strong-local-economy>

The community is invited to take part in a short survey to share their views on the Discussion Paper and view the documents regarding the paper.

Drop in Session

You can attend **an online drop-in** session to share your views on the Discussion Paper with Council staff.

Community focus group – 1pm-2.30pm on Wednesday 20 October

Community focus group – 5.30pm-7pm on Tuesday 19 October

Business focus group – 9am-10.30am on Monday 25 October

Contact Staff

You can **contact Council staff** if you have further questions or comments.

Attention: Darcy Coombes (he/him)
Economic Development Project Officer
City of Whittlesea

Email: Business@whittlesea.vic.gov.au

T: 03 9217 2275 | National Relay Service 133 677 (ask for 9217 2275)

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Call us

Phone: 9217 2170
National Relay Service: 133 677
(ask for 9217 2170)
Free telephone interpreter service:
If you speak a language other than
English, please call 131 450

Free telephone interpreter service



131 450

October 2021