# Proposal to lease 1F Ashline Street, Wollert for affordable housing for local people - November 2021

# **Introduction**

This document compiles a response to questions asked by participants at the Community Information Session on the proposal to use land at 1F Ashline Street, Wollert for affordable housing, hosted by the City of Whittlesea on Wednesday 6 October 2021.

The questions have been grouped in themes so the responses to similar questions can be easily found in the document and viewed together.

For further information, contact Council’s Strategic Futures team by calling 9217 2056 or email  strategic.planning@whittlesea.vic.gov.au.

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# **Themed Questions and Answers**

## About the proposal

1. ***Why council is choosing this land for affordable housing?***

This land was chosen because there is an urgent need for affordable housing in Wollert and across the City of Whittlesea. The site is currently vacant and is zoned for housing. The site is ideally located for affordable housing because it is close to parks, schools, shops, public transport (356 & 358 bus lines) and other facilities.

There has been a plan to deliver affordable housing in this area through the Epping North East Structure Plan (2008), which is the overarching strategic plan for the area. This is further discussed below under ‘Moving the community centre’.

1. ***How many houses will be constructed?***

Council has not decided how many houses will be built on the site. The planning provisions that apply to this site would allow for between 15 and 36 homes to be built. At this stage, Council is deciding whether to lease the land to a community housing organisation.

1. ***Why is this proposal in Wollert? Can it be put in another area?***

Everyone needs a home. Affordable housing is part of our housing system in Australia and is considered essential community infrastructure.

There is a significant undersupply of affordable housing in Wollert, particularly for people on low incomes. In the 12 months to December 2020 there were no affordable rental properties in Wollert for households with a very-low income. (Source: <https://housing.id.com.au/whittlesea/affordability-and-availability#how-affordable-is-renting>)

The Epping North East Structure Plan (2008), which is the overarching strategic planning document for the area, aims to *facilitate and promote the provision of affordable housing* in the precinct, and therefore, there has always been a desire to locate affordable housing in the area. Whilst the land at 1F Ashline Street Wollert has not always been designated for affordable housing, the proposal aligns with the original plans for the precinct.

Council will continue to advocate for and facilitate the development of affordable housing in other suburbs in the City of Whittlesea and across Wollert, to address the critical undersupply.

The proximity to the school makes this site an ideal location for housing. It is likely that the people who live in this housing would be those who can most benefit from living near a school, such as families with young children.

1. ***Previously the plan was to have affordable housing in Mickleham, why it came to Wollert.***

Micklehem is not in the local government area of the City of Whittlesea. This project was never planned for Mickleham. This is the first stage of considering this proposal in Wollert.

1. ***The council already organised for approx 1500 affordable housing, why is this required here?***

There are no other plans that have facilitated 1500 affordable housing dwellings in the City of Whittlesea however there are sites in the City of Whittlesea where affordable housing is being delivered right across the municipality. Refer to the response above regarding why the proposal has been made for this site in Wollert.

## Outcomes and benefits

1. ***Is there evidence that this will have a positive impact?***

Within Australia, and also overseas there is research that demonstrates the positive benefits of longterm, safe, and secure affordable housing. 1 The benefit is to the tenant, to the community, and the economy measured through reduced demand on health services and greater participation in education and the workforce.

We don’t have detailed stats for this particular site – the extent of the benefit will depend on the amount of housing and the tenants that live there – for example, families whose kids attend the local school may make a greater contribution to volunteering at the school, or providing staff for local businesses, whereas the positive impact by an older person might relate to reduced demand on the health system or greater community connection.

In terms of the positive impact of the way the development looks – good quality design and building materials would be a requirement for any development of the site.

1 Source: C.Nygaard, *Social and Affordable Housing as Social Infrastructure* (2019), Swinburne University of Technology,<https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Social-and-affordable-housing-as-social-infrastructure-FINAL.pdf?x12261>

1. ***How would is be beneficial for locals?***

Local people would benefit from being able to access local affordable housing that is urgently needed. The housing would be available to eligible households who live in or who have connections with the Wollert area or the City of Whittlesea.

The vacant block of land would be developed with quality housing, which would be well integrated into the surrounding area and help meet the diverse housing needs of local residents.

1. ***What considerations have been made for stigma against the future residents?***

Council recognises that people who live in public housing, and other forms of affordable housing, not only endure disadvantages, but also the stigmatisation and stereotyping of their experiences by others in the community.

Council must uphold the right of everyone to be protected from inhuman or degrading treatment, and actively opposes the labelling of such groups and individuals in a way that is disrespectful or defamatory.

This housing would be high-quality and well integrated into the surrounding neighbourhood.

Council would select a community housing organisation with expertise in community development. The partnership agreement with the community housing organisation would include provisions to ensure there is a planned approach to community development that seeks to build community connections between the people living in the housing and the surrounding neighbourhood and to prevent stigmatisation.

1. ***Why haven’t Council consulted the community about what it needs most at this site?***

This proposal responds to the critical need for affordable housing options in Wollert. We have heard from the community through the Council Plan that housing is high on the list of what is needed.

The need for and location of other essential community infrastructure, including open space and community facilities, are identified in the plans for the area. A new community facility is currently under construction on the site of the Wollert East primary school, and there are existing parks and open spaces close to the site. An active recreation reserve is also planned close to the site. Council is investing in the community infrastructure and services that the community needs.

## The people who would live in the housing

1. ***Will Council consider limiting the proposal to more targeted members of the community i.e. elderly or women?***

It is important to note that The City of Whittlesea believes housing is a basic human need that contributes to individual and community safety and wellbeing. Every person, regardless of their age, culture, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation, has a right to affordable and appropriate housing to enable their participation in community life.

Community housing organisations support people on low incomes or with particular needs by providing affordable and stable homes. We know from local evidence that families with children and young people are most in need of affordable housing in the City of Whittlesea. People are matched to homes by looking at their individual needs and paying close attention to location, design and support requirements. Community housing organisations also rent homes to key workers such as health care workers, or teaching support staff, who are an essential part of the make-up of any community.

If Council decides to lease the land to a community housing organisation, it could include a preference for the housing to be for specific groups of people based on local housing needs and the context of the site.

Council could decide to select a community housing organisation that specialises in housing specific groups of people, for example, women, older people, people with a disability or First Nations Peoples.

1. ***Would essential workers be given priority over the unemployed?***

The proportion of renters who are essential workers would be determined based on the local housing needs and the type of housing developed. Community housing organisations also need to meet their obligations to house people from the Victorian Housing Register – which includes people on a statutory income (e.g. pensioners) but also people who are working in low income jobs.

1. ***Will the housing accept people with criminal, violent and drug use histories?***

It is unlikely that Council could prevent people who have a criminal record from living in the housing, just as it is not possible for Council to exclude people with a criminal record from living in private housing market on the same street.

Council would work closely with the community housing organisation to ensure the development and ongoing management of the housing is a success for existing and new residents. That might include putting in place an agreement that the housing not be used for people exiting the justice system.

Community housing organisations, just like any other landlord, have obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure that the privacy, peace and quiet enjoyment of neighbouring residents are not affected by tenants and their visitors.

## Consultation process and decision making

1. ***Is this definitely going to go ahead?***

Council have not made a decision yet whether to proceed with this proposal. The outcomes of the consultation activities will be presented to Council in 2022, to inform its decision whether or not to proceed

1. ***When will Council allow face-to-face consultation on this proposal?***

Unfortunately, we have not been able to hold face-to-face consultation due to the COVID lockdown restrictions. However, we have decided to extend the consultation activities to have further conversations with the community about the proposal and gather feedback in 2022. The details of these activities will be promoted on the project website and emailed to people who have signed up to the project mailing list.

1. ***How will Council consider the preferences of current locals in St Claire Estate?***

Households who live near 1F Ashline Street were sent direct correspondence seeking their feedback on the proposal through the online consultation survey. Residents from St Claire’s estate had the opportunity to provide their feedback via survey or directly to Council officers. There will also be additional engagement activities planned for early 2022.

The outcomes of the consultation, including the additional engagement activities, will be presented to Council along with evidence of local housing needs.

In making its decision, Council will consider the feedback of neighbouring residents and homeowners, the broader population of Wollert and the City of Whittlesea, and the evidence of housing needs.

1. ***Will Council be transparent and show all of the questions received at the community information session?***

These FAQS include all the questions submitted as part of the online information session. These questions and any comments submitted as part of this event will be considered by Council in their decision-making.

1. ***Will Council extend the consultation time to allow time to answer all community questions before making decisions?***

The consultation survey was widely promoted and was open for four weeks between 7 September and 10 October 2021 and further consultation activities will be planned for early 2022. We received over 1,000 responses to the survey.

1. ***What will it take for Council to scrap this decision?***

The outcomes of this current community engagement period will be presented to Council to consider at a formal meeting in 2022 to decide whether or not to proceed. The report presented to Council will outline feedback received through the consultation activities and other factors, such as broader community needs, research and evidence relating to this proposal.

1. ***Why are Council limiting consultation to 'inform'?***

The level of consultation for this proposal is ‘Consult’, which means the promise to the public is that *‘We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.’* This consultation is in line with the *City of Whittlesea Community Engagement Policy 2021*, *A Voice For All.*

1. ***Why were local residents not notified by Council about this proposal?***

Letters were sent to surrounding residents and property owners. The community survey was promoted on Council’s website, social media, local radio and local print media. To receive future updates about this project you can sign up to the project mailing list.

1. ***Do you care about the surrounding homes?***

This consultation is to seek feedback from the community, including surrounding residents, to inform the decision making on this proposal. Council is seeking to provide positive outcomes for the local community and local people, including existing residents and local people who require affordable housing.

1. ***What decision is being made in December 2021?***

Council has not yet made a decision whether or not to proceed with this proposal.

Originally we planned to report back to Council in December on the outcomes of the community consultation process. The timeframes for this have now been revised to allow for further consultation activities in early 2022.

1. ***Where was the data from that showed 70% of community support the need for affordable housing?***

The information session and Council report on this proposal referenced the community consultation that took place in March 2021 for the Council Plan. The consultation showed that of the 54 people who responded to the survey on social and affordable housing, 70% agreed that Council should take action to increase the supply of social and affordable housing within the City of Whittlesea. The outcomes of that consultation are published [here](https://hdp-au-prod-app-whit-engage-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/4616/2933/0517/Lets_Talk_ReportAW_Digital.pdf).

While those survey results do not represent the views of everyone in the City of Whittlesea, it does provide an indication of community sentiment on the issue of housing insecurity and has been considered as part of developing this proposal, in addition to affordable housing data and evidence.

1. ***What legal Avenues do I have to oppose this?***

A decision is yet to be made about the proposal. You have the opportunity to raise your concerns through the consultation process. In terms of legal avenues available to you, Council cannot provide legal advice, but you could contact the Victorian Ombusdman (www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au) for advice.

1. ***Why weren’t all residents in the St Claire area advised of this?***

The residents and property owners who are in direct proximity to 1F Ashline Street were contacted directly about this proposal as they are more likely to be impacted by the proposal to lease the site for housing.

1. ***Why wasn’t it decided earlier before people moved into the locality? Why now after most of the houses are constructed?***

The decision to change the location of the proposed community centre from this site was made in November 2020. Council is now considering housing as an alternate use for this vacant property and is undertaking community consultation on this proposal.

1. ***Why wasn’t the community able to make public comments at the community information session?***

The online community information session on this proposal was primarily designed to provide another option for the community to hear about the proposal and submit questions. Further engagement activities are planned for early 2022. These FAQs respond to all the questions submitted as part of the information session.

## Traffic

1. ***Will independent observation on current and future traffic impacts be monitored as part of preliminary considerations, including once the school opens?***

A detailed traffic impact assessment prepared by an external consultant would be required to be prepared to support any proposal to develop the site for housing. This would assess the existing and future volumes of traffic and the potential impact on the road network and road safety. This assessment would also take into account the traffic impact of the new primary and secondary schools.

Traffic and car parking would be a key consideration in any development for this site. Council would need to ensure the development has sufficient car parking for future residents, safe pedestrian access and efficient local traffic connections.

An initial analysis of the traffic impact has shown there is more than enough capacity of the surrounding road network to cater for residential development at this site.

Analysis shows there would be approximately 90-210 additional vehicle trips per day in the area if the property was developed with 15-36 dwellings, which is the estimated number of dwellings allowed under the existing planning provisions.

An independent traffic assessment shows Ashline Street has a capacity of up to 2,000 vehicle trips per day and High Park Drive and De Rossi Boulevard between 3,000 and 7,000 vehicle trips per day. According to a traffic impact assessment report for the development of the area, the traffic generated on High Park Drive and De Rossi Boulevard is expected to be approximately 2,500 vehicles per day. Therefore, the existing road infrastructure has more than sufficient capacity to handle an increase in traffic volume should the site be developed for housing. This includes consideration of the new schools and services planned for the area.

If the property had been developed as a community centre, the average increase in traffic volumes would have been greater, given the number of services run out of the centre and events held at the centre.

## Public transport

1. ***Will there be more public transport in the area as this site is not close enough to public transport?***

The 356 and 358 bus lines provide sufficient access to public transport for an affordable housing development at this site.

A [new bus route (390)](https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/footer/about-ptv/improvements-and-projects/bus-and-coach/new-bus-service-between-mernda-and-craigieburn-stations/) will also begin operating on 31 October 2021 that will go from Mernda Station via Bridge Inn Road, Epping Road and Craigieburn Road to Craigieburn Station. This is also within a suitable walking distance of Ashline Street, Wollert.

Council advocates for affordable housing to be provided near services and public transport.

## Car parking

1. ***How will affordable housing keep parking on the street under control?***

Car parking would be a key consideration in any development for this site. Council will ensure there are enough car parking spaces for residents as part of the planning approval process, and that car parking needs for this development wouldn’t interfere with the drop-off/pick-up traffic of the nearby school.

1. ***Will Council review the surrounding properties that use a garage as part of their kitchen or living space and block streets with excess cars?***

While properties may be required to be built with a car space/garage, Council cannot force residents to keep their car on their property rather than on the street. Any registered vehicle is permitted to park legally along a roadway.

Nature strip parking is not permitted under the Road Safety Road Rules across the State of Victoria.

Illegally parked vehicles can be reported online here: <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/parking-roads-footpaths/parking/>

Or call our Customer Service Centre on 9217 2170 to report specific issues.

## Eligibility for affordable housing

1. ***Who will be eligible for the affordable housing and how do you apply?***

Affordable housing is an umbrella term that refers to a range of subsidised housing types. Affordable housing provides accommodation for eligible families and individuals on very low to moderate incomes who cannot afford to rent in the private rental market. The Victorian Government defines very low to moderate income households as those with incomes up to $62,610 for single adults and $131,500 for families. Rents are set to ensure the households can afford it, typically 25-30 per cent of the household income.

To be eligible to access affordable housing, an individual or family must register with the State Government-run [Victorian Housing Register](https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register).

1. ***Why have Council decided to overcrowd the established community by proposing 3,800 homes?***

Council are not proposing 3800 houses in this area. The housing would be a similar design and density as if it was developed as private housing. The existing planning controls for this site allow for 15-36 dwellings.

The question of who will live in this housing is addressed above. It is inappropriate and inaccurate to suggest that people living in affordable housing are ‘unsocial people’.

Council has a duty to uphold the right of everyone to be protected from inhumane or degrading treatment, and actively opposes the labelling of such groups and individuals in a way that is disrespectful or defamatory.

1. ***Why would we make contributions for someone else when we made our houses with hard work day and night?***

Affordable housing is an essential part of the housing system in Australia and is considered essential community infrastructure the same as roads, sportsfields, and libraries. There will always be people in our community who need subsidised housing.

## Safety of the neighbourhood

1. ***What will you do to ensure safety of the neighbourhood e.g. proximity to children and school?***
2. ***What impact does council expect from potential increases in crime and negative social impact associated to this proposal?***
3. ***Who will be responsible for any security threats from tenants?***

Council would work closely with the community housing organisation to ensure the development and ongoing management of the housing is a success for existing and new residents. That might include putting in place an agreement that the housing not be used for people exiting the justice system.

Community housing organisations, just like any other landlord, have obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure that the privacy, peace and quiet enjoyment of neighbouring residents are not affected by tenants and their visitors.

Tenants who do not meet the obligations of the *Residential Tenancies Act* and the obligations set out by the community housing organisation can be vacated from the property. The *Residential Tenancies Act* provides a process for this. But as with any person, serious criminal behaviour can result in a person being arrested on the spot.

Research shows there isn’t a link between criminal behaviour and affordable housing, in fact there is a greater risk of crime when people don’t have access to safe, secure, affordable housing. (Source: [Understanding and addressing community opposition to affordable housing development | AHURI](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/211))

1. ***How many years 1 house will be leased to a tenant?***

Tenants would be able to stay in the housing for as long as they are eligible and as long as they meet the requirements of the *Residential Tenancies Act* and the policies of the community housing organisation.

## Devaluing surrounding properties

1. ***Where's the research that states that affordable housing won't drop the price of surrounding properties?***

This is a commonly raised question regarding affordable housing in Australia. There is little evidence to suggest that affordable housing developments impact negatively on the values of surrounding properties. A study by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2013) undertook modelling of property values surrounding affordable housing developments. The study found that ‘*the impact of affordable housing development on property sales values can be positive or negative, but it is usually minimal either way and far outweighed by other factors. The study found no evidence to suggest that affordable housing development has a universally damaging impact on property sales values.’* (Source: [Understanding and addressing community opposition to affordable housing development | AHURI](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/211))

Property values are impacted by a large number of factors. In general, property values are increasing across Melbourne, including Wollert.

If Council decide to proceed with the lease, the housing would be just like housing in the surrounding streets and would be a high-quality development.

The houses would be managed by a community housing organisation with proven expertise in property management, tenancy management and community development.

Council would retain the land so will have control through the lease to make sure the development is of high-quality design and is well managed.

## Moving the community centre

1. ***Why was this land advertised as being for a community centre and then moved to the land near to school?***
2. ***Why was the community centre moved without consultation?***

There has been a plan to have affordable housing in this area since 2008 through the *Epping North East Structure Plan* – the overarching strategic planning document for the area. While the land at 1F Ashline Street Wollert has not always been designated for affordable housing, the proposal aligns with the original plans for the precinct.

The plan also includes the potential *to ‘co-locate the community activity centres with schools’,* which has now occurred.

The site at 1F Ashline Street, Wollert, was originally acquired for a community centre, but after further investigation, Council decided to move this community centre to the adjacent Wollert East Primary School site across the road from Ashline Street. This has allowed for better connections between the school, kindergarten, community space, active sporting space.

It has also meant the community centre can be a higher quality facility due to the larger site, which features early childhood education and care, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services, community spaces, and consulting rooms and offices for visiting services.

The decision to deliver the community centre on the school site was made in November 2020. When the decision was made, it was released publicly in the council minutes and was also included in the local press in December 2020.

Council advertised the new community centre in the Local Scoop newsletter in March 2021 and there is information about the centre on Council’s website.

In July this year, Council held a community consultation about the naming of this centre which many local residents participated in. The details of this consultation are on our website. <https://engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/cc-wollert-east>

1. ***Will Council acknowledge the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution transfer, Community Activity Centre location changes, and consequences on neighbours who did not knowingly purchase in this estate with a separate development in the middle of it?***

Council acknowledges the location of the community centre has been moved to the school site to deliver a better outcome. The land previously identified for the community facility has been zoned for residential use since 2008, which supports the land to be used for housing. The design of the housing would consider potential impacts on neighbours.  There are no impacts of GAIC in respect to this site or proposal.

## Three-storey housing on this site

1. ***Has council considered the down sloping and low lying nature of this block of land on Ashline Street and the impact of double and triple story dwellings upon design suitability, views of neighbours?***
2. ***Why are 3 storey dwellings being considered in an area with mainly single or double storey houses?***

While up to 3 storey dwellings are permitted in all residentially zoned land in Melbourne, Council has not decided on the height of any housing development for this site.

This consultation is to gather community feedback on the proposal to use this site for housing, including feedback on the height and density.

If Council decides to proceed with this proposal, the housing will need to be high-quality and a similar design to the surrounding area to make sure it is well integrated and keeps with the neighbourhood character. Council would ensure any development would not unduly impose on the surrounding neighbours.

If Council decides to proceed with this development, plans will be prepared for the proposed housing in partnership with the community housing organisation. The local community would have an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed plans for housing on this property.

## Medium and higher density housing at this site

1. ***Why have Council only considered usage of the full site rather than just a little bit for a couple dwellings?***
2. ***What's the research show about clustering of community housing for low/moderate incomes?***
3. ***Why hasn't Council considered smaller numbers of dwellings as per blocks consistent with that built by Henley to fit in as part of St Claire's design?***
4. ***Why with all the land around Wollert, cannot we consider affordable housing throughout the estates - instead of just one large scale (36 dwellings) development?***

Council have not decided if the entire site should be used for housing or how many houses would be built on the site.

There are positive examples of affordable housing developments of this scale or larger that are managed by community housing organisations in other areas. There are also examples of smaller scale developments. What is important in terms of successful outcomes is how well the houses are designed, how well they meet the needs of residents, how well they are built, and how well they are managed.

This consultation seeks feedback from the community on whether to lease the land to a community housing organisation. If Council decides to proceed with the lease, then it will work with a community housing organisation to prepare a development plan that best suits characteristics and local housing needs. The community would have an opportunity to provide feedback on the development plan for this site.

## Selling back the land

1. ***Will Council consider Henley's offer to purchase the land back?***

To build Wollert East Community Centre on the Wollert East Primary School site Council agreed to a 50-year lease with the Department of Education. In order to guarantee the local community has access to a community facility beyond 50 years, it is important that Council retain ownership of the land at 1F Ashline Street, Wollert. For this reason, Council is proposing the land at Ashline Street also be leased for a maximum 50-year term. This is the maximum allowable term that council-owned land can be leased for under the Local Government Act (2020).

## Affordable housing contributions by developers

1. ***How many developers in COW are providing extra land to provide affordable housing?***

Since June 2018, the Planning and Environment Act has an objective to *facilitate the provision of affordable housing*. All Councils have an obligation to implement the objectives of the Planning and Environment Act. Council is working with developers to encourage the provision of affordable housing across the municipality. Where Council already owns land, there is an opportunity to facilitate the provision of affordable housing on its own land. There are many examples of affordable housing being provided in new developments across the municipality.