

21.02 MUNICIPAL PROFILE

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21.02-1 General Overview

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The City of Whittlesea has been traditionally characterised by its rapidly expanding residential areas and its continuing focus as an urban growth area. Although the City will continue to be an urban growth area in the future it also needs to manage a variety of other land uses.

Located on the urban rural fringe, the City of Whittlesea is fortunate to have the full spectrum of urban and rural land uses. The diversity in land use, including significant employment areas and activity centres, residential communities, farming activities, township communities and educational and other community uses is matched only by the diversity in landscape character and qualities.

Existing diversity in land use categories and the potential for new development is a strength of the City of Whittlesea. The allocation of growth areas and the relationship between areas reserved for other purposes will continue to require careful management to ensure there is an overall level of compatibility. Incorporation of elements of the natural environment within future growth area planning is of vital importance to enable the City to enhance its image in all land use categories.

21.02-2 Locational and Regional Context

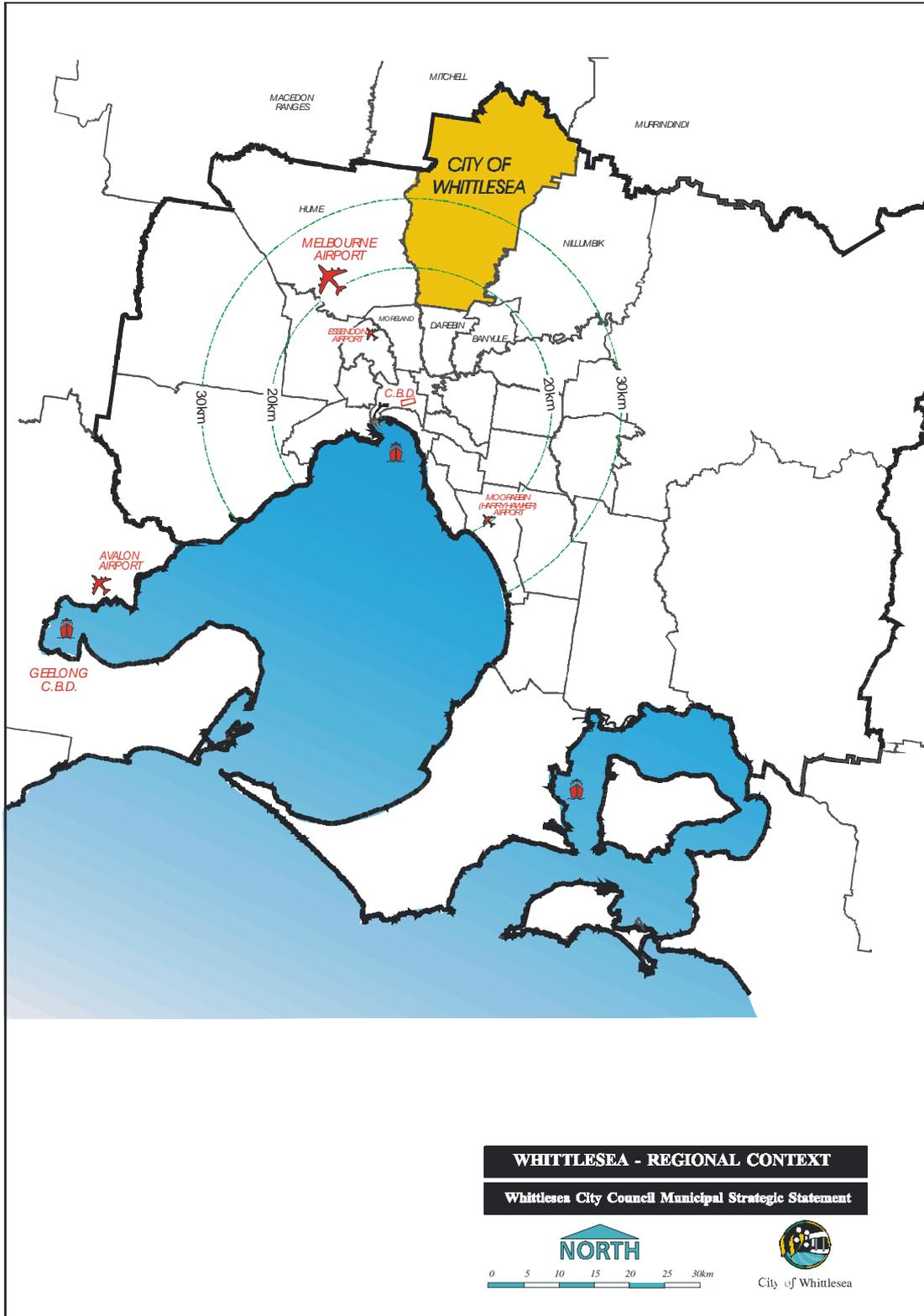
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The City of Whittlesea is located on the metropolitan fringe approximately 20 kilometres to the north of Melbourne. Covering an area of approximately 487 square kilometres, the City is physically one of the largest municipalities in Metropolitan Melbourne.

Plenty Road and High Street form the major north-south transport routes through the City and a series of routes such as Mahoneys Road, Settlement Road, McDonalds Road, Findon Road, Cooper Street and Donnybrook Road cut cross the City in an east west direction. These routes link the City of Whittlesea to the adjoining municipalities and the remainder of the metropolitan area. The Metropolitan Ring Road traverses the southern section of the City and provides an important passenger vehicle and freight link to the Hume Highway, Melbourne Airport and the Port of Melbourne.

The City of Whittlesea adjoins the Shire of Nillumbik to the east, the City of Hume to the west, the Cities of Banyule and Darebin to the south and the Shires of Murrundindi, and Mitchell to the north (refer Regional Context plan).

The Yan Yean and Tourourrong reservoirs and water supply catchment areas occupy a substantial portion of the northern part of the City. These areas, apart from supplying much of Melbourne with water, incorporate sites of flora and fauna significance. In conjunction with the Kinglake National Park and Plenty Gorge Parklands they provide significant tourism resources where controlled visitor access is possible. There is also a substantial amount of industrial and commercial development in the municipality due to the City's convenient access to central Melbourne and other employment centres and major transportation corridors such as the Western Ring Road and Hume Highway.



21.02-3 Key Issues15/11/2012
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As one of Melbourne's fastest growing municipalities, meeting the demands of a rapidly expanding population is one of Whittlesea's greatest challenges. In addition to meeting the needs of new residents and expanding population in growth areas, the City also puts in place strategies to combat the problems associated with ageing and declining populations in established areas.

The provision of physical and social infrastructure in a cost effective and timely manner is of paramount importance. Growth area planning in this context often relies on individual developers contributing to two levels of infrastructure. This includes infrastructure to meet the needs created directly by the development and secondly contributing equitably toward the establishment of items of infrastructure which serve a more extensive catchment. As such, the City continually strives to set in place mechanisms to require, apportion and administer funds that are of particular importance in ensuring that infrastructure is provided and maintained in a sustainable manner.

In particular, the City requires resolution of long term strategies to ensure that land reserved for residential, industrial and commercial development is suitably serviced.

Activity Centres play a vital role in the provision of access to a range of goods, services and employment and depending on their size and location, a range of community activities. Activity centres often also have an important part to play in the development of public transport routes and interchanges and the establishment of associated land uses. It is essential that existing and future residents of the City of Whittlesea are provided with a range of accessible activity centres which fulfil their shopping, employment, social and recreation needs.

Rapid population growth has also required careful management and delineation of the boundaries between land reserved to accommodate growth and land set aside for rural or conservation purposes.

Environment and Landscape Values

A feature of many rapidly growing fringe areas is the lack of character and identity they possess and subsequently their inability to generate a sense of place and community. The City of Whittlesea is characterised by an abundance of natural features that contribute greatly to the attractiveness and amenity of the region. The northern parts of the municipality comprise state forests, national parks, grasslands of national significance, recreation areas, water catchments, extensive rural areas, red gum woodlands and a network of rivers, creeks and drainage lines which extend into the urban areas.

The City of Whittlesea contains many diverse and rich urban and environmental features which have been identified for preservation and enhancement in order to retain the character of the municipality in the face of rapid urban development.

Particular emphasis has been placed upon the identification of the 'values' of the non-urban areas which contain these features both in the Whittlesea context and the wider northern region. Incremental incursion into these areas beyond the boundaries of land reserved for future urban development must be avoided to ensure long term preservation and enhancement of the character of the City of Whittlesea.

The importance of environmental features within areas reserved to accommodate urban growth (employment and residential) and their ability to contribute to the creation of character and a sense of place cannot be overstated. These features offer both the opportunity to distinguish between residential growth areas, activity and employment centres and to unify and future defines the character of the City of Whittlesea.

The City ensures that growth does not physically encroach into environmentally sensitive areas so that environmental assets are retained for future generation's individuals, community organisations and businesses. Continual importance is required to ensure the identification of environmental values, including on-going management requirements. Key areas where continued improvement is required are in the treatment of waterways, both from a water quality and abutting

development perspective, vegetation removal, minimising the impacts of pest plants and animals and emphasising the benefits to be gained through the pursuit of energy efficient design.

Built Environment and Heritage

Housing character and variation in built form is closely linked to the period of development and cultural background of residents. There are a variety of building styles ranging from the timber and brick homes characteristic of the 1950's and 60's through to the larger mission brown houses characteristic of the 1970's to early 80's. More recent housing development includes a mix of more contemporary design with a high proportion of period reproduction homes.

Landscape character influences are more evident in the eastern half of the urban areas where there is more mature and regular street planting and a stronger 'native' planting and landscape theme. Housing provision in newer estates is increasingly becoming more varied to meet the needs of a diverse and changing population. Alternative forms of housing such as row houses or terraces, multi-unit development and houses with a range of number of bedrooms can be found throughout the older suburbs where redevelopment opportunities are available. Newer estates also present opportunities where diversity is increasingly being incorporated in subdivision design. These alternative forms of housing add interest and vitality to existing and new urban areas and reflect a 'maturity' of the Whittlesea housing market.

Housing

While the City continues to attract predominantly young families, it is essential that the housing needs of a more diverse cross section of the population are planned for. This is to cater for the needs of new residents but also to accommodate the needs of existing residents looking to move within the City. Movements within the City account for a substantial proportion of all housing demand wherein residents have a strong tendency to move in an outward direction along the major transport corridors. The City acknowledges the vital role that it can play in influencing the type of residents that are attracted to the municipality through housing provision. Diverse housing forms bring long term diversification in demographic composition and create interest and identity within urban areas.

Character is an important element in all urban areas. In this context the City places a strong emphasis on ensuring that redevelopment and infill development proposals respect and add to the character of existing urban areas. Similarly, planning for developing urban areas must be respectful of, and incorporate elements of, the natural environment where ideally housing forms and styles of subdivision should be influenced by, rather than being imposed upon the natural environment.

Economic Development

The City of Whittlesea is fortunate to have large tracts of land which have been developed for employment generating purposes and good prospects for future development. The City is well represented in manufacturing, warehousing and distribution activities. Industrial and other employment generating activities, however, are currently spread disproportionately across the City. The traditional industrial estates in Thomastown and Lalor have been progressively developed with few remaining infill opportunities. Generally these areas are focussed on declining sectors of the economy and have a poor visual amenity.

Prospects for future development are good based on anticipated levels of population growth and other locational advantages and increasing levels of home based business and telecommuting. To foster increased growth in employment generating activities the City has supported the reservation of land for employment purposes in four major locations;

- (i) Cooper Street;
- (ii) South Morang;
- (iii) Mernda/Doreen; and
- (iv) University Hill.

The City sustains long-term employment growth within a diversity of sectors through progressively upgrading the appearance of employment centres and increasing the choice and location of land available for employment generating activities.

In keeping with wider objectives to diversify the demographic profile of residents the City also ensures that there is diversification in employment opportunities, including home based employment in home businesses and telecommuting

Planning for employment growth with easy access to future residential areas and activity centres is essential for the City to continue developing effective focuses for the establishment of higher order goods and services. A preferred location for one-off employment uses which require substantial buffers or which for a variety of other reasons are not appropriate for employment areas such as Cooper Street have been specified to avoid inappropriate encroachment into non-urban areas.

Transportation

The road network within the City of Whittlesea consists of a grid of north – south and east west main and secondary roads. The roads are spaced approximately two to five kilometres apart. Many of these roads are predominantly two lane contra flow roads, a number of which require widening and/or duplication.

North–south road capacity is currently severely limited beyond the City and east–west road links are discontinuous particularly at their eastern and western terminuses due to natural land features such as the Plenty River and the Merri Creek. The network of internal collector and lower order roads offers a varying level of connectivity throughout the municipality. To a large extent the level of connectivity is influenced by approaches to subdivision design and models of urban development. Notably, connectivity in the eastern half of the urban areas in Mill Park, and to a lesser extent Bundoora, is constrained by a curvilinear road design which causes movements to become indirect and overly reliant on the main and collector road network.

Public transport within the municipality includes heavy rail along the Epping Line, which is currently being extended to South Morang and light rail along Plenty Road which extends to McKimmies Road plus a series of bus services. These services provide a disjointed level of public transport and constrained ability to move from east to west and vice versa across the municipality. Highly developed land use and transportation relationships are currently being developed at rail stations and bus stops where the synergies between public transport routes and commercial and employment centres have will be capitalised upon.

The lack of north–south road capacity and continuous east - west routes pose a significant constraint on the future growth and development of the City. The allocation of future residential growth opportunities and their relationship to land reserved for short and long term employment growth continually increases the need for and incidence of east–west movements across the municipality. These movements are important for private car based travel, freight movements and public transport routes. Resolution of the preferred hierarchy of east–west transport routes including their eastern and western terminus is a priority.

Planning for extension of the existing heavy and light rail services remains essential to the ultimate successful integrated development of the City. While it is accepted that extensions to the metropolitan heavy and light rail systems do not occur ahead of demand, the likelihood of extensions can be enhanced by two principle factors. Firstly, land must be set aside to accommodate the extension and, secondly, planning for beneficial land uses in proximity to interchanges and routes must occur. Flexibility of use of the future routes is also a key factor, where if appropriate planning takes place, there may be the potential to utilise a future heavy rail route as a bus route for example. In other words, the City views routes as ‘transport corridors’ as opposed to fixed option dedicated routes.

Subdivision design and land use patterns must also incorporate opportunities for the introduction of public transport. Efforts are being directed toward the introduction of bus services, as well as other forms of transportation such as bicycle routes. Similarly, a high level of connectivity within and between subdivisions is endorsed by the City to enhance the effectiveness of transportation networks generally.

Drainage

The City is contained within the catchments of three major watercourses; the Plenty River, the Darebin Creek and the Merri Creek. These watercourses and their tributaries provide suitable opportunities for the establishment of drainage facilities. Of increasing importance however, is the establishment of these facilities in a manner which is both environmentally and economically sustainable.

Increasingly, Melbourne Water as the authority responsible for main drainage is favouring the establishment of wetlands systems to control water quality prior to discharge. While this type of drainage control can be accommodated within growth areas on the basis of a drainage scheme, existing areas where there are known drainage problems including lack of capacity and water quality problems require on-going site specific measures to improve performance. Where integrated drainage solutions are identified in association with drainage schemes, the City carefully consider impacts on the surrounding development and spatial allocation of other land uses and activities, in particular open space.

It is accepted that drainage facilities often incorporate some capacity for passive leisure activities. However, where there is a drainage scheme in place, land occupied by the facility and covered by an easement of inundation will not be included within open space contributions attributable to the development which is subject of the drainage scheme.