

21.02 MUNICIPAL PROFILE

19/01/2006
VC37

21.02-1 DAREBIN YESTERDAY – THE HISTORY

19/01/2006
VC37

Prior to European settlement the area that is now Darebin was largely open grasslands, with stands of River Red Gums and other bushy plants particularly near the creeks. The area was inhabited by the Wurundjeri-willem people, part of the Woiworung clan that inhabited a large portion of central Victoria, including what now forms the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

After European settlement of the area quarrying for basalt, clay and sand were undertaken forming the basis for many industries. Market gardening and dairying were also popular, particularly on the flat grassy plains and near the creeks.

The main influences on the pattern of development in Darebin we see today have been geology and topography, the speculative and gradual nature of development and the sporadic development of public transport services.

The city developed gradually over 100 years from a rural and agricultural base to an industrial base. The original grid street pattern laid down by Hoddle related to the creeks that border the city. These creeks, together with the basalt geology in the north-east, restricted development until after World War II.

The early land purchases in Darebin were concentrated in Northcote and Preston and were speculative rather than for the purpose of immediate development. Gradually, homesteads and mansions emerged on the favoured locations along creeks and on hilltops in Northcote and Fairfield, some of which remain today. In the 1850s, Rucker's Hill emerged as the first formal suburb, whilst the scattering of modest timber dwellings in Preston earned it the nickname "Irishtown" amongst the local farmers.

In the 1880s land boom, local workers from crowded inner city suburbs escaped to Northcote and Preston to larger houses on cheaper land. Despite the vast tracts of land that were subdivided during this time, very little was developed until after World War I.

During the inter-war years, tramway construction and railway electrification helped to consolidate previously undeveloped areas. During this period, Preston became a favoured suburb for State Bank and Housing Commission housing.

The rapid growth of the population in post-war years, especially the 1950s to the 1970s, was fuelled by immigrants leaving the inner urban suburbs, and led to significant demographic changes and increased development. The northern and eastern parts of the city, including Kingsbury, Reservoir East, Keon Park and Merrilands, were developed and a wave of apartment development occurred in established areas.

During the 1990s to the present, bushland and former state government land in the northern parts of the municipality, particularly Reservoir, Macleod and Bundoora, have been subdivided for residential development and are popular for their bush setting within easy reach of the Melbourne CBD.

This has implications for Darebin today and into the future as the faces that have shaped Darebin continue to exert their force. Darebin has a land-use pattern of industrial land interspersed with residential development, and with the exception of Northland, mostly strip based commercial areas.

National and global economic changes have lead to a decline in local manufacturing which has created a need in Darebin to examine alternative uses, such as mixed use and residential, for pockets of redundant industrial land.

Melbourne 2030 places great emphasis on activity centres as places for new residential development, however the interwoven strip shopping centres create a major challenge as they are non-nodal, and tend to 'bleed' in and out of industrial areas.

In some areas, titles contain single dwelling covenant that have implications for the future development of that area, while potential and known heritage places need to be conserved for future generations.

21.02-2 DAREBIN TODAY

19/01/2006
VC37

21.02-3 Location

19/01/2006
VC37

Darebin commences approximately 4kms to the north of Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD) and extends a further 10kms to the north. It borders the Cities of Yarra to the south, Whittlesea to the north, Moreland to the west and Banyule to the east. Darebin is well positioned to take advantage of its relative proximity to employment, recreation and entertainment opportunities of the CBD, as well as those in neighbouring inner and outer ring municipalities.

21.02-4 Regional Context

19/01/2006
VC37

Major transport corridors within the municipality run in a north-south direction and comprise of St Georges Road, High Street, Plenty Road and the Epping and Hurstbridge heavy rail lines. Running in an east-west direction are Bell Street, Mahoneys Road and Heidelberg Road. Bell Street, which is located in the centre of Darebin, forms a demographic edge between the city's inner southern area and its northern remainder. In addition the Western Ring Road, located to the north just outside the municipality, runs in an east-west direction and provides links to Melbourne Airport, Geelong and the eastern suburbs. Also running in an east-west direction but located outside the municipality to the south, is the Eastern Freeway. The freeway links to the central city and eastern suburbs.

Two significant tributaries of Yarra River, the Darebin Creek and the Merri Creek, flow from the north and form the majority of the eastern and western boundaries of the municipality. Central Creek and Edgars Creek flow towards the city from the north into Edwardes Lake that acts as a major water retention basin. Also of regional significance are the waterways within the grounds of La Trobe University.

A number of services and facilities within the city serve a regional role in the northern Melbourne metropolitan area. These include retail centres such as Northland Shopping Centre and the Preston Central Activity Centre which are both designated as principal activity centres in *Melbourne 2030* and attract retailers and customers from a regional catchment. In addition Preston Market plays a sub-regional retail role for fresh food and vegetables.

The municipality also has regionally significant educational institutions such as the main campus of La Trobe University in Bundoora and Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE in Preston, both of which provide training and educational opportunities of regional influence. Immediately to the north is RMIT Bundoora, which is located in the City of Whittlesea. A number of parks and recreational facilities, such as Edwardes Lake, Bundoora Park and Darebin Parklands, also cater for a catchment that extends well beyond the municipality's boundaries.

21.02-5 Municipal Overview

19/01/2006
VC37

The City of Darebin covers approximately 53 square kilometres. With 127,882 residents and 55,000 properties in 2002, it contains one of the largest and most diverse communities in the State. In the metropolitan level context, Darebin ranges from inner to middle ring development. The City includes the established and historic suburbs of Northcote, Alphington, Fairfield, Thornbury, and extends to Preston, Reservoir, and the recently developed areas of Kingsbury and Bundoora North East Growth Corridor. Darebin

extends from Heidelberg Road in the south to Mahoneys Road in the north, Darebin Creek to the east and Merri Creek to the west.

Darebin's community has undergone a number of significant changes in recent years. These changes have been driven by changing demographic patterns in Melbourne, land and house price increases and structural changes in the industrial sector.

21.02-6

19/01/2006
VC37

People

The population of Darebin was 127,882 in 2002. This represents growth from the 1996 figure of 127,430, and thus a reversal in the long period of decline since the 1970s. This annual growth rate of 0.2% is however, smaller than the metropolitan Melbourne average growth rate of 1.2%. Darebin's population is projected to grow to approximately 132,000 in 2006 and 136,000 by 2011.

Spatially this population growth has not been uniform. Local areas experiencing population growth include:

- residential developments in the North East Corridor; and
- redevelopment of established housing and infill.

Local areas where population decline has occurred include pockets of residential land in Merri, close to the Merri Creek, and parts of Reservoir North.

Over the next ten year period the municipality is expected to have significant population base "ageing in place", while still attracting younger new households particularly in the southern precincts of the municipality. Over one quarter of the population is currently aged over 55 years, and the average age continues to climb. While there is a higher proportion of young adults aged 20-29 than the metropolitan average, there are less people under 20 and more over 60 years than the average.

This has implications for future housing in Darebin as household sizes are shrinking, and even if population numbers remain stable, the amount of housing required to accommodate this population will increase.

21.02-7

19/01/2006
VC37

Community Characteristics

Darebin is home to a culturally diverse population. Almost a third of Darebin's residents were born in a non-English speaking country, and approximately 40% of the population speak a language other than English at home. Among the City's larger communities are the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Macedonian, Vietnamese and Lebanese. This presents both an opportunity through the celebration of the various cultures, and an issue in relation to service provision where inclusion, equity and access must be addressed.

The City has the second highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of any municipality in Victoria and the highest number in metropolitan Melbourne with over 1,000 indigenous people.

Darebin accommodates a wide range of religious groups. It has more than twice the Melbourne average proportion of Orthodox Christians, and the fifth highest proportion of Muslims in Victoria with 4.2% and the sixth highest number of Muslims in the state.

Although the municipality is experiencing increasing affluence a significant number of Darebin residents live in poverty, and require particular attention in service planning. In addition, people with disabilities form a significant group in the City's community and experience varying levels of difficulty in accessing housing, facilities and services.

21.02-819/01/2006
VC37**Housing**

Darebin has a diverse housing profile. Darebin has a wider range of housing, both in terms of dwelling types and house prices, than the Melbourne average. Darebin has more flats, units and apartments as a proportion of total dwellings than the metropolitan Melbourne average. Only one third of all dwellings in Darebin are separate houses accommodating approximately three-quarters (75%) of all residents. This is lower than the Melbourne average where three-quarters of all dwellings are separate dwellings, housing over 80% of all residents.

Public housing is an important component of Darebin's housing stock, with over 2,500 households in Darebin renting from the public sector. This represents 5.2% of the housing market and is almost twice the metropolitan Melbourne average of 2.9%.

House prices in the municipality vary above and below the Melbourne average. In the June 2002 quarter, median house prices were as low as \$250,000 in Reservoir in the north and as high as \$465,000 in Alphington to the south. The metropolitan Melbourne median house price in the June quarter 2002 was \$327,500. Prices are rising on average a little faster than the metropolitan average.

Melbourne 2030 states that the 'northern region', which includes the Cities of Darebin, Hume, Whittlesea, Nillumbik, Moreland and Banyule, must accommodate expected growth of 110,000 households in the next 20 years. The Department of Sustainability and Environment estimates that 45% or 50,000 of these will be in 'greenfields' development, while 32% (35,000) will be new dwellings on strategic redevelopment sites and centred on Principal and Major Activity Centres, defined in the strategy. The remaining 25,000 households required in the region are to be accommodated in 'dispersed urban and non-urban development'. The exact locations of these various forms of dwelling developments are to be determined through further research and discussions between municipalities and the Department upon finalisation of the strategy. Clearly, however the City of Darebin will have some responsibility in accommodating the future growth of Melbourne and the northern region.

21.02-919/01/2006
VC37**Education**

The level of education of Darebin's population has been increasing over the last ten years, with the proportion of the population aged over 15 years with no post-High School qualification declining from 66.1% in 1991 to just 56.2% in 2001. In contrast the proportion of Darebin's population with a Bachelor degree or higher has more than doubled from 5.6% in 1991 to 8.6% in 1996 and 11.8% in 2001.

This change in education levels is evidence of the changing demographic profile, rising affluence of the community and an increase in the variety of lifestyles within the municipality.

21.02-1019/01/2006
VC37**Employment**

Unemployment rates in Darebin are higher than the metropolitan Melbourne average with Darebin's unemployment rate in the December quarter 2002 at 9% compared to 5.8% for metropolitan Melbourne, although the differential has declined from September 1997 to 3.2% in December 2002.

Darebin residents have traditionally had a higher representation in manufacturing employment than the metropolitan Melbourne average. This has, however, been changing in recent years, and in 2001 Darebin had a lower proportion of its residents employed in manufacturing than the metropolitan average (15.6% compared to the metropolitan Melbourne average of 16%). Industries where Darebin residents were more likely to be employed than the Melbourne average included education, health & community services and government administration. These results suggest that Darebin is moving away from

its traditional blue-collar manufacturing based employment with greater numbers of people employed in growth industries.

21.02-11 Economy

19/01/2006
VC37

Darebin's local economy has undergone significant change in recent time, moving from a traditional industrial base to a more modern retail and business focussed profile. The City of Darebin is home to approximately 5,200 businesses, providing around 44,000 jobs, about one third of which are occupied by Darebin residents. However Darebin experienced a loss of 5,000 local jobs between 1996 and 2001 and this trend is expected to continue. Darebin's two major employers include the manufacturing industry and the retail sector.

The manufacturing sector has undergone a period of significant change and restructure, resulting in the decline of some parts of the industry and a demand for modern manufacturing facilities on well serviced and accessible land.

21.02-12 Social and Physical Infrastructure

19/01/2006
VC37

The City of Darebin owns, controls, manages or maintains an extensive range of physical assets and infrastructure. These include roads, drains, street trees, 300 buildings, and 450 hectares of parkland. While the range of assets is good, many of the infrastructure elements are requiring more frequent maintenance due to their age and increasing demands from a larger number of dwellings.

Darebin also has numerous clubs, sporting bodies, community and special interest groups. These groups contribute greatly to the development of our community, and play a special role in catering for local and specific needs. Council provides significant resources and facilities to support these groups in recognition of their contribution to the quality of life of our local community.

21.02-13 Natural Environment and Open Space

19/01/2006
VC37

Darebin is a highly urbanised municipality with pockets of remnant natural areas. It is bounded on two sides by the Darebin and Merri Creeks which provide wildlife corridors and a focus for local parks and cycling and walking tracks. The city is home to the Central Creek Grasslands and other significant habitat areas at Bundoora Park and La Trobe University and surrounds. Edwardes Lake is a major recreational feature in the municipality's north, Darebin Parklands to the south, and the former Northcote Tip has been transformed into All Nations Park. It is important to maintain these natural assets for future generations.

21.02-14 Precinct Profiles

19/01/2006
VC37

As stated in the introduction, Darebin City Council is moving towards a model of precinct planning. The identified precincts are both readily identifiable by the local community and accord with census collection districts - this enables accurate analysis. A map of the precincts is contained in the MSS introduction at Clause 21.01-2.

Descriptive snapshots of each precinct are provided here:

Fairfield/Alphington

Westgarth, Fairfield and Alphington are Darebin's smaller suburbs, nestled beside the Darebin Creek in the south eastern corner of the municipality. The area is characterised by Victorian through to interwar buildings, mostly free standing houses and a number of units, set amongst a green landscape.

Residents highly value the architecture and character of the buildings and the fact the area is so close to the city, but not too close to restrict the space available for gardens. The

cultural mix in the area is also a definite attraction for some residents, who have said that it “makes the area vibrant.” Residents proposed that future development needs to occur in a sensitive manner that is respectful of this.

The success of the area has also led to local concerns about the potential impacts of additional parking and traffic problems, not only from new residential and increasing car ownership rates, but also from the commercial success of the local shopping centre.

Alphington is split between Darebin and the City of Yarra, and as such community development initiatives and council decisions need to be made in collaboration between both Councils.

Although only a small proportion of Darebin’s residents live in Fairfield/Alphington, the area continues to attract new residents, particularly second and third homebuyers with mature families, as it develops as a gentrified inner city suburb. The area is becoming increasingly gentrified with a highly educated and professionally employed populace, growing household incomes and a decreasing proportion of non-English speaking residents.

Kingsbury / Bundoora

Kingsbury/Bundoora is a residential and educational precinct in the north-eastern corner of the municipality. Much of the area was developed in the 1960s and 1970s, with some major residential estates, such as Lancaster Gate, Springthorpe, Gresswell Grange and Mount Cooper, being developed from the 1990s onwards. Although there is a small amount of unit development and higher density student accommodation in the area, most of the residences are free standing houses on medium to large lots.

The area is renowned for its substantial amount of open space and parkland, including Bundoora Park, as well as La Trobe University which provides important employment, educational, research and economic services within the municipality.

Although the local population is the smallest in Darebin, it is continuing to grow with the development of the new residential estates and student housing. These new estates are attracting mature families, many of whom are from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This contributes to the high proportion of non-English speaking residents in Kingsbury/Bundoora. The proportion of young adults in the area is also quite high due in part to the large student population.

Although house prices are lower in Kingsbury/Bundoora than the Darebin average, rental prices are higher than average, reflecting the student–lead demand for rental properties near the universities. The new developments (eg Springthorpe) are leading to increasing affluence in the precinct.

There are a relatively low proportion of residents employed in professional fields, with individual incomes slightly lower than the Darebin average. This is to be expected given the high proportion of students in the precinct.

Home computer and internet use is much higher in Kingsbury/Bundoora than in Darebin as a whole, again reflecting the high student population.

Northcote

Northcote is Darebin’s oldest suburb, nestled along the reaches of the Merri Creek in the south of the municipality and dissected by the north-south commercial and retail spine of High Street. Northcote is a predominantly residential area dominated by Victorian and Edwardian freestanding houses, with a growing number of unit developments.

Northcote’s topography is dominated by Rucker’s Hill, which in conjunction with All Nations Park, contributes significantly to a physical sense of place by providing an orientational fix, due to extensive views in all directions to the central City, Mount Macedon and the Dandenong Ranges.

Northcote's population of over 20,000 is increasing steadily as the area becomes popular, particularly with young adults attracted to the period housing and newer medium density developments.

Northcote has a large proportion of residents with a high level of education, with the majority of the local residents employed in professional fields. As a result, household and individual incomes are quite high. This gentrification of Northcote has led to a decrease in the number of non-English speaking residents and an increase in house prices, car ownership and computer and internet use.

Like Fairfield/Alphington, Northcote is experiencing gentrification similar to areas close by such as Fitzroy.

Preston East

Preston East, in the centre of Darebin is a mostly residential area dotted with substantial industrial and commercial land. The area contains the East Preston Industrial area, which is Darebin's most substantial industrial precinct, as well as the Northland Principal Activity Centre.

The area is characterised by inter-war through to post-war housing on medium sized blocks, with some 1960s and 1970s development to the north. The precinct also has a significant amount of public housing.

The local population of nearly 15,000 has decreased over recent times and consists mostly of mature families with fewer young adults, a significant minority, many of whom are of a non-English speaking background.

There are fewer residents with high educational qualifications, with a higher than average proportion of the workforce employed in manufacturing. Rental and mortgage repayments in Preston East are quite low compared to the rest of Darebin. Residents are less likely to use the Internet or own a home computer or car.

Preston West

Preston West is a residential area situated in the centre of Darebin generally extending from the Merri Creek to High Street. The precinct is characterised by inter-war through to post-war housing on medium to large blocks, with an even spread of units that have been developed in recent years.

The local population of about 12,000 people has declined over the past few years and consists of a large number of families and older adults. There is a high level of ethnic diversity in the area, with many residents from a non-English speaking background.

A small number of residents have a Bachelor degree or higher qualification, with the majority of the workforce employed in the manufacturing industry.

House and rental prices in Preston West are fairly similar to the Darebin average and are somewhat cheaper than Darebin's southern suburbs. About one third of households have a computer and use the internet.

Reservoir East

Reservoir East is a mainly residential precinct in the north-east corner of Darebin, with a major commercial strip located at the Broadway in the centre of the precinct. The area grew rapidly in the post-war years and is characterised by post-war through to 1970s housing with a few small pockets of earlier Victorian and Edwardian buildings and a small number of units developed in recent years.

The slowly increasing local population of about 23,000 people is made up a high proportion of children under 20 years, a low proportion of middle aged adults and a high proportion of adults over 60 years. This reflects the way that older residents choose to age in the family home where they feel comfortable and safe.

Just under one third of Reservoir East residents were born in a non-English speaking country but more than 40% prefer to speak a language other than English at home.

Nearly two thirds of the population aged over 15 years do not have a post high school qualification, with a higher than average unemployment rate and low computer and internet use. The majority of the local workforce is employed in manufacturing.

Household and individual incomes in Reservoir East are slightly lower than the Darebin average and rental prices are considerably lower than in some of Darebin's more popular suburbs.

Residents have indicated that they don't like the fact that many low-income earners are being pushed out of the area because they can't find the right sort of housing or costs are too high.

Reservoir West

Reservoir West is Darebin's most northern precinct, bound by the Merri Creek and a number of major roads. Most of the precinct was developed in the 1960s and 1970s and contains large post-war through to 1970s houses. The last major larger subdivision of the area is currently being developed in the Central Creek area. Reservoir West is well known for its medium to large blocks which are well suited to large families. In the Merrilands area, the majority of sites have single dwelling covenants attached to them.

The local population has increased slightly in recent years, with the majority of the 22,000 residents consisting of adults over 50 with children and young teenagers. Like most of Darebin's post-war suburbs, many older adults choose to stay in the family home and age in place.

More than one third of the local population was born in a non-English speaking country, with a large proportion of not only Darebin's, but Melbourne's, Italian population.

The majority of the population over 15 years have no post high school qualification, with a high proportion of the workforce employed in trades. Household and individual incomes in Reservoir West are lower than the Darebin average, although house and rental prices are significantly lower than the Darebin average.

Almost a third of the local residents have a home computer and use the internet. Interestingly, Reservoir West residents have a high rate of car ownership with many households having three or more cars due to the structure of families and the relative lack of public transport.

Thornbury

Thornbury is one of Darebin's smaller residential precincts, extending from the Merri Creek to the Darebin Creek. The area has an interesting mix of Victorian, Edwardian and interwar housing on small to medium blocks, with a very high proportion of units.

The local population of about 17,000 people has increased slightly in recent years with an influx of young, often childless adults in their 20s and early 30s moving in to take over the traditional family homes vacated by older residents.

Thornbury's population shares the same basic ethnic mix as Darebin as a whole, with about one third of the local population born in a non-English speaking country, including a considerable Greek and Italian population.

Thornbury has seen a substantial change in the socio-economic profile of its community over the last ten years. The proportion of the population aged over 15 years with a Bachelor degree or higher qualification has almost trebled. The proportion of employed professionals has also increased significantly and is now higher than the Darebin average.

Thornbury has slightly higher average individual incomes than Darebin as a whole, but the same basic household income structure as Darebin.

Residents are very positive about the multiculturalism that is present in the area. They also believe that having garden space and public landscaping (both in parks and streets) is very important. There is concern that a local sense of community is under threat from the loss of many small local strip shopping centres.