



Merri-bek
City Council

COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

Wednesday 10 June 2026

Commencing 6.30 PM

Bunjil (Council Chamber), Merri-bek Civic Centre,
90 Bell Street, Coburg

Language Link

This is the Agenda for the Council meeting.
For assistance with any of the agenda items,
please telephone 9240 1111.

這是市政會會議的議程。您若在理解議程中有需要協助的地方，請打電話給“語言連接 (Language Link)”翻譯服務，號碼9280 1910。

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Αυτή είναι η Ημερήσια Διάταξη για τη Συνεδρίαση του Συμβουλίου (Council Meeting). Για βοήθεια με οποιοδήποτε από τα θέματα της ημερήσιας διάταξης, παρακαλείστε να τηλεφωνήσετε στο Γλωσσικό Σύνδεσμο (Language Link), στο 9280 1912.

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Belediye Meclisi Toplantısının gündem maddeleri burada verilmiştir. Bu gündem maddeleri ile ilgili yardıma ihtiyacınız olursa, 9280 1914 numaralı telefondan Language Link tercüme hattını arayınız.

Đây là Nghị Trình cuộc họp của Ủy Ban Quy Hoạch Đô Thị. Nếu muốn biết thêm chi tiết về đề tài thảo luận, xin gọi điện thoại cho Language Link qua số 9280 1915.

यह काँसिल की बैठक का कार्यक्रम है। कार्यक्रम के किसी भी विषय के बारे में सहायता के लिए कृपया 9280 1918 पर फोन कीजिए।

这是市政府例会的议题安排，如果需要协助了解任何议题内容，请拨打9280 0750。

ਇਹ ਕੌਂਸਲ ਦੀ ਮੀਟਿੰਗ ਦਾ ਏਜੰਡਾ ਹੈ। ਏਜੰਡੇ ਦੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਆਈਟਮ ਬਾਰੇ ਮਦਦ ਲਈ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 9280 0751 ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the City of Merri-bek

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek, and pays respect to their elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Information about Council Meetings

These notes have been developed to help people better understand Council meetings. All meetings are conducted in accordance with Council's Governance Rules.

WELCOME The Mayor, who chairs the meeting, formally opens the meeting.

APOLOGIES Where a Councillor is not present, their absence is noted in the minutes of the meeting. Council may also approve leaves of absence in this part of the meeting.

DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS INTERESTS A Councillor has a duty to disclose any direct or indirect financial or other interests, they may have in any matter to be considered by Council that evening.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES The minutes of the previous meeting are put before Council to confirm the accuracy and completeness of the record.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS At each Council Meeting provision of 10 minutes will be made in the Agenda for the Mayor and Councillors to acknowledge and recognise achievements of local individuals and organisations; and raise matters considered important to Council.

PETITIONS Council receives petitions from citizens on various issues. Council formally accepts petitions at Council meetings.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME This is an opportunity (30 minutes), for citizens of Merri-bek to raise questions with Councillors.

COUNCIL REPORTS Council officers prepare detailed reports, which are considered by Councillors and a Council position is adopted on the matters considered. The Mayor can invite firstly Councillors, secondly Officers, and then citizens in attendance to identify Council reports which should be given priority by the meeting and considered in the early part of the meeting.

NOTICES OF MOTION A motion which has been submitted to the Chief Executive Officer no later than 12 pm (noon) 10 business days prior to the meeting which is intended to be included in the agenda. The motion should outline the policy, financial and resourcing implications.

NOTICE OF RESCISSION A Councillor may propose a motion to rescind a resolution of the Council, provided the previous resolution has not been acted on, and a notice is delivered to the CEO or delegate setting out the resolution to be rescinded and the meeting and date when the resolution was carried. If a motion for rescission is lost, a similar motion may not be put before the Council for at least one month from the date it was last lost, unless the Council resolves that the notice of motion be re-listed at a future meeting.

FORESHADOWED ITEMS This is an opportunity for Councillors to raise items proposed to be submitted as Notices of Motion at future meetings.

URGENT BUSINESS The Chief Executive Officer or Councillors, with the approval of the meeting, may submit items of Urgent Business (being a matter not listed on the agenda) but requiring a prompt decision by Council.

CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS Whilst all Council meetings of Council are open to the public, Council has the power under the *Local Government Act 2020* to close its meeting to the public in certain circumstances which are noted where appropriate on the Council Agenda. Where this occurs, members of the public leave the Council Chamber or Meeting room while the matter is being discussed.

CLOSE OF MEETING The Mayor will formally close the meeting and thank all present.

NEXT MEETING DATE The next Council meeting will be held on Wednesday 8 July 2026 commencing at 6.30 PM, in the Bunjil (Council Chamber), Merri-bek Civic Centre, 90 Bell Street, Coburg. The next Planning and Related Matters meeting will be held on Wednesday 24 June 2026 commencing at 6.30 PM.

WELCOME

1. APOLOGIES/LEAVE OF ABSENCE

2. DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. MINUTE CONFIRMATION

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 13 May 2026 be confirmed.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS

5. PETITIONS

- 5.1 PETITION - OPPOSE MERRI-BEK COUNCIL'S FORTNIGHTLY RUBBISH PICKUP PLAN 5

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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8. NOTICES OF MOTION

- 8.1 GLENROY PASCOE VALE ROAD ACTIVITY CENTRE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND REVITALISATION 530

9. NOTICE OF RESCISSION

Nil

10. FORESHADOWED ITEMS

11. URGENT BUSINESS

5. PETITIONS

5.1 PETITION - OPPOSE MERRI-BEK COUNCIL'S FORTNIGHTLY RUBBISH PICKUP PLAN

A petition (D26/248624) has been received with 534 signatories opposing Merri-bek Council's fortnightly rubbish pick up plan.

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Receives the petition opposing Council's fortnightly rubbish pick up plan.
2. Refers the petition opposing Council's fortnightly rubbish pick up plan to the Director Place and Environment and the Director City Infrastructure for consideration and response.

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|----|--|------------|
| 1↓ | Petition - Oppose Merri-bek Council's Fortnightly Rubbish Pickup Plan - Redacted | D26/248668 |
|----|--|------------|

[Petition - Oppose Merri-Bek council's fortnightly rubbish pickup plan - Australia - Change.org](#)



The issue

Starting from July 2027 Merri-bek Council plans on changing general waste collection from weekly to fortnightly.

We don't have to be pitted against each other. We also want to reduce landfill AND there are better ways.

Council's own Circular Economy Policy was only adopted late last year. Get some scores on the board on initiatives and education before cutting services to an unequipped community.

Rubbish collection is the most fundamental service council provides. Waste doesn't disappear because bins are collected less often — it simply rots longer in our homes. For families with young children, all menstruating residents, elderly residents managing incontinence, pet owners, and people in high-density housing already sharing bins, storing biological waste for two weeks isn't a minor inconvenience. It means odours, hygiene risks, vermin, and a genuine loss of dignity — especially in summer. Please don't subject us to health risks or force residents to use plastic in an attempt to capture offensive odors.

34 other Victorian Councils are saying NO to the Purple bin. The future of waste management is precarious and an election is looming. Merri-bek Council should not proceed with this change until the State Government decides on expansion of its CDS scheme and the tens of millions of cost other Councils nor its ratepayers will pay.

Your bin capacity will decrease by 25% over the fortnight. Merri-bek Council claims it will give concessions for XL bins for nappies and large families and those with a medical condition and in the trial minimum evidence had to be given so it wasn't a barrier to upsizing to a larger bin. These concessions will allow 33% more capacity negating the reduction by other households.

Merri-bek is incredibly diverse. From Brunswick to Fawkner, none of our 11 wards are the same, yet this proposal treats all of them identically. Shared bin spaces WILL overflow. Footpaths WILL be cluttered. Bins WILL get contaminated.

Elderly and disabled residents already struggle with their current bins.

We currently manage 110 tonnes of illegally dumped rubbish every month. Reduce collections, and that number will rise — along with the cleanup costs rate payer's foot. These things all cost money. From consultants, engagement, new bins, removal of old bins. We need transparency. Please show us how that stacks up against projected landfill savings.

Your own trial report states 51% of participants found the change very difficult/difficult compared to 37% that found it very easy/easy, yet public messaging focused almost entirely on positives. This disconnect erodes trust.

Councillors in neighbouring councils including a couple that sit and chair sustainability committees — including Whitehorse — have voted against fortnightly collection after hearing from their communities which is proof there are better ways.

INSTEAD Let's invest in education. Print stickers to provide clearer bin signage. Partner with businesses to make certified compostable FOGO bags accessible. Improve recycling & composting habits. All this can be done without removing a crucial service residents rely on every single week.

Together we can put back trust in our council when we see the council listen and put public health, dignity, accessibility, and fairness first.

Please keep the weekly rubbish bin collection.

Name	City	State	Postal Code	Country	Signed On
	Melbourne		3044	Australia	19/05/2026
	Melbourne		3044	Australia	19/05/2026
	Pascoe Vale		3044	Australia	19/05/2026
	Mili Tokic		3046	Australia	19/05/2026
	Melbourne		3000	Australia	19/05/2026
	Melbourne		3006	Australia	19/05/2026
	Melbourne		3002	Australia	19/05/2026
	Melbourne		3144	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3046	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3058	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3073	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3058	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3042	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3006	Australia	20/05/2026
	Fawkner		3060	Australia	20/05/2026
	Illawong		2234	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3058	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3000	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3044	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3044	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3141	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3058	Australia	20/05/2026
	Adelaide		5033	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3060	Australia	20/05/2026
	Coburg		3058	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3000	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3081	Australia	20/05/2026
	Craigieburn		3064	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3101	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3060	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3058	Australia	20/05/2026
	Traralgon		3844	Australia	20/05/2026
	Brunswick West		3055	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3058	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3076	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3199	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3336	Australia	20/05/2026
	Sydney		2161	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3020	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3163	Australia	20/05/2026
	coolaroo		3056	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3000	Australia	20/05/2026
	Oak park		3046	Australia	20/05/2026
	Melbourne		3055	Australia	20/05/2026
	North Melbourne		3051	Australia	20/05/2026
	Glenroy		3046	Australia	20/05/2026

7. COUNCIL REPORTS

7.1 KERBSIDE WASTE REFORM - FORTNIGHTLY RUBBISH

Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade

Director City Infrastructure, Greg Rodwell

Sustainability and Climate; and City Services

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes that the proposed introduction of a fortnightly rubbish collection service is the last stage of Council's major kerbside waste reform program adopted by Council in 2021, following previous implementation of booked hard waste and the four-bin kerbside service.
2. Notes that a fortnightly rubbish service would save ratepayers at least \$16 million over the next decade when compared to a weekly rubbish service.
3. Thanks the 3,000 households and businesses in parts of Hadfield and Brunswick/Brunswick West that took part in the trial of fortnightly rubbish.
4. Notes the evaluation findings from the fortnightly rubbish Trial during July–December 2025, which reduced waste sent to landfill by 19 per cent and almost doubled the amount of food waste recovered via food and garden organics (FOGO) bins.
5. Thanks the community for almost 2,000 contributions received during eight weeks of community engagement about fortnightly rubbish (detailed at Attachment 1).
6. Having considered the trial findings, community feedback, Council's adopted policy settings, financial implications, environmental outcomes, equity impacts and implementation requirements, resolves to endorse one of the following options:
 - a) Option 1: endorses the transition to a municipality-wide fortnightly rubbish service as standard from July 2027, including the policy adjustments, concessions, implementation supports and operational measures outlined in this report.
 - or
 - b) Option 2: Resolves to retain weekly general rubbish collections as Council's standard service and discontinue the fortnightly rubbish Trial arrangements in the current Trial areas.
7. If having resolved Option 1 in point (6) above, authorises the Chief Executive Officer to update and release Council's *Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy* to reflect Council's decision and the service adjustments outlined in this report as follows, together with any necessary administrative amendments:
 - a) Increase the standard rubbish bin to 140 litres (instead of 120 litres);
 - b) Increase the maximum volume for rubbish to 480 litres per fortnight (instead of 360 litres in the Trial), with an associated increase in the waste charge multiplier;
 - c) Provide ad hoc rubbish collections for a fee on an as-needed basis (instead of an annual fee option for ongoing weekly rubbish collections);
 - d) Rename the Financial Hardship concession to a Pensioner Concession, applicable to rubbish and FOGO bins, and streamline eligibility to align with the Municipal Rates Concession;

- e) Provide weekly rubbish collection service, with adjusted charge, for large apartment buildings (e.g. 20+ households) where Council deems that fortnightly rubbish is not viable; and
 - f) Provide operational discretion for delegated Officers to make manageable service adjustments for case-by-case exceptional circumstances, including on compassionate grounds.
8. If having resolved Option 2 in point (6) above, authorises the Chief Executive Officer to update and release Council's *Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy* to reflect Council's decision and remove the section relating to the fortnightly service and the fortnightly Trial.

REPORT

Executive summary

Council has committed to reform its kerbside waste service in stages to progress strategic goals to reduce waste to landfill, minimise greenhouse gas emissions, and provide a cost effective and equitable service for ratepayers that aligns with State Government policy. Council recovers the cost of providing kerbside waste services through the cost recovery model of a waste charge paid by ratepayers.

In 2021, after three stages of extensive community consultation, Council adopted its Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy (the Policy). This included three significant stages of reform, two of which have already been delivered: booked hard waste and the four-bin kerbside service, including FOGO and glass. The final stage is transitioning to a fortnightly general rubbish collection service – subject to implementation and evaluation of a trial, education programs and evaluation of waste patterns (as outlined in Previous Council Decisions).

Council's adopted long-term goal is to divert 80 per cent of kerbside waste from landfill by 2030. This aligns with the Victorian Government's broader target to divert 80 per cent of all waste from landfill by 2030. Council's kerbside target is intended to be achieved through both reducing waste generation overall and improving diversion to recycling and organics streams. The main reasons for this goal are:

1. To reduce the significant environmental impact of landfill – through the land it impacts directly and through the very high methane emissions that occur when organic waste (food and garden waste) breaks down in landfill.
2. To reduce costs to the ratepayer – landfill is by far the most expensive waste stream to process, exacerbated by the rapid increase in State Government levies to disincentivise rubbish going to landfill.
3. To reduce impact on landfill capacity – the capacity of Melbourne's existing landfills will progressively run out over the next 15 years.

While the introduction of weekly food and garden organics (FOGO) collections for all households in 2023 has significantly increased the amount of food waste diverted for composting, Merri-bek's overall diversion rate sits at 52 per cent (up from 48 per cent in 2022). This means Council remains a long way from achieving its goal of 80 per cent diversion by 2030. Evidence from Merri-bek's trial and from other Victorian councils indicates that a fortnightly rubbish service, supported by weekly FOGO, can significantly improve landfill diversion (see **Figure 1** on page 6).

A six-month trial of fortnightly rubbish collections commenced in July 2025. The trial included areas of Brunswick, Brunswick West and Hadfield. It was designed to test the anticipated benefits of fortnightly rubbish, the impact of potential unintended consequences (e.g. dumped rubbish, contamination), and behavioural change.

Trial evaluation results to December 2025 indicate that the fortnightly service achieved a 19 per cent reduction in waste sent to landfill across all trial areas and a near doubling of food waste diverted from rubbish bins to the FOGO bins. During the trial period, there was no evidence of significant change in contamination, illegal dumping, or household waste deposited in public litter bins.

The trial also included a simple process for households to access concessions, enabling eligible households to receive a larger rubbish bin at no additional cost where they had young children in nappies, significant medical needs, or other relevant circumstances. Uptake of concessions was approximately four to five per cent of households.

On this basis, the trial demonstrated that fortnightly rubbish collections are feasible in Merri-bek and can contribute to reduced landfill, increased food waste diversion, cost savings, and emissions reduction. This could deliver approximately \$16 million in savings to ratepayers, reduce waste sent to landfill by approximately 35,000 tonnes and save over 15,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over 10 years.

In response to trial learnings and community feedback, it is recommended that a municipality-wide roll-out of fortnightly rubbish collections be modified to include a 140-litre standard size rubbish bin, rather than the 120 litres used in the trial, and continue easy access to concessions for eligible households.

The final round of community engagement on fortnightly rubbish took place in March and April 2026. The transition to fortnightly rubbish collections represents a significant service change for the community. As expected, feedback included opposition and uncertainty from some residents, as well as support or acceptance from others.

While fortnightly rubbish collections would represent a substantial change for many residents, council officers have considered the potential financial and environmental benefits alongside the trial outcomes, community feedback, and proposed service adjustments. The trial results, experience from other Victorian councils, and changes proposed in response to community feedback are relevant considerations in determining whether to proceed with a municipal-wide roll-out from July 2027.

This report puts forward two options.

Option 1 would proceed with a modified fortnightly rubbish change – increasing the volume and offering more supports to the community. On balance, Option 1 would deliver stronger financial and environmental outcomes, including reduced landfill, increased food waste recovery, lower emissions and lower long-term costs to ratepayers. However, it requires a significant service change and careful mitigation of practical impacts for households, particularly larger households, households with nappies, medical needs, pet waste, limited bin storage or shared bin arrangements.

Option 2 would retain a weekly rubbish service in Merri-bek. It would better preserve current service expectations and respond to community concern but would mean Council does not realise the forecast financial savings or progress towards its adopted landfill diversion targets to the same extent. Should Council choose to proceed with Option 2, it is recommended that fortnightly rubbish collections in the trial areas cease. The trial and engagement costs have provided Council with local evidence to inform its decision. If Option 2 is selected, the forecast longer-term benefits of fortnightly rubbish would not be realised.

Previous Council decisions

Key council decisions relating to kerbside waste reform including fortnightly rubbish are listed below.

Kerbside Waste Reform – Proposed Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy – 8
December 2021

That Council:

...

4. *Adopts the Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy as presented at Attachment 3 noting that this is reflective of an 'End State', with implementation to occur in stages:*
 - a) *2022 – commence new booked hard waste service.*
 - b) *2023 – transition to 4-bin service, introducing weekly FOGO, fortnightly Recycling, monthly Glass, BUT maintaining weekly Garbage collection as a transition stage.*
 - c) *from 2023 to 2025, undertakes a number of trials, education programs, evaluation of waste patterns including:*
 - *an assessment about the usage of the weekly FOGO bins and whether the FOGO bins are used sufficiently to make the shift to fortnightly landfill collection feasible*
 - *assessment of changes in patterns of dumping of rubbish, including additional household rubbish in park bins*
 - *a trial of fortnightly landfill collection is conducted at two sites, one in the south and one in the north*
 - d) *2025 (TBC) – following the actioning of resolution 4c) above, receives a report which includes an assessment of the trials, usage of the FOGO bins and reporting on any increase in dumping of rubbish, including additional household rubbish in park bins in order to inform a decision to switch to fortnightly Garbage collection as standard, achieving the End State defined in the Policy.*
5. *Notes that a decision on the timing of the switch to fortnightly Garbage collection and two booked hard waste collections would be subject to a future Council decision.*

...

8. *Authorises the Director City Futures to make final amendments to the final Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy to reflect Council resolutions.*

Contract Variation: Contract 529T Provision of Waste Services – Fortnightly Rubbish Trial – 12 February 2025

That Council:

1. *Under the provision of Contract 529T Waste Services Agreement (Contract),*
 - a) *negotiate and finalise the value of a Deed of Variation between Council and Citywide Service Solutions Pty Ltd ABN 94 066 960 085 (Contractor) for the provision of kerbside collection of general waste on a fortnightly basis to support the Fortnightly Rubbish Trial within the Southern Collection District, up to a maximum value specified in Confidential Attachment 1 for services to be provided during the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.*

...

Waste Collection Update: Southern Collection Area Contract Matters 529T and Fortnightly Rubbish Timing – 13 August 2025

That Council:

...

3. *Approves a delay in the decision on the ongoing municipal-wide frequency of fortnightly rubbish collections to no later than June 2026; enabling:*

- a) *A longer period for active evaluation of the trial areas of parts of Hadfield, Brunswick West and Brunswick.*
- b) *Further community engagement on fortnightly rubbish collection following the trial outcomes.*
- c) *Adequate time for procurement of bins required for a municipal-wide fortnightly rubbish service.*

...

Related prior decisions:

14 July 2021 – Council endorsed the draft Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy for public exhibition.

9 December 2020 – Council resolved to consult the community on a range of different service options (i.e. collection frequency) and their different cost implications.

13 May 2020 – Council committed to extensive engagement to inform the development of the Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy and associated roll-out of the universal FOGO and new separate glass recycling service (i.e. four-bin service) following State Government policy announcement in February 2020.

10 April 2019 – Council resolved to implement a universal FOGO service, endorsing implementation option C (weekly FOGO, alternating fortnightly general rubbish and recycling collections) as the foundation for detailed planning and community engagement.

1. Policy context

The transition to a fortnightly rubbish service delivers on endorsed policy, strategic directions and targets within Council's:

- Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy
- Circular Economy Strategy 2025
- Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025-2030.

Council Plan 2025-2029

Theme 1: Care for nature and climate resilience.

Initiative/Priority 1.6 - Enable and engage the community to take meaningful action for resilience, a safe climate and circular economy, with a focus on vulnerable communities including First Peoples, including delivery of programs and services that improve thermal comfort, reduce energy bills, reduce carbon emissions, and reduce waste to landfill.

Council Action Plan 2025/2026

CAP#9 - Deliver circular economy community initiatives and trial fortnightly rubbish service.

Relevant Victorian Government policy/legislation

Relevant Victorian Government legislation and regulation include:

- *Recycling Victoria: a New Economy 2020–2030 and the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021*, requiring four-stream service to all households.
- A final Victorian Government Household Waste and Recycling Service Standard is pending. This is to include standard bin contents lists and clarify a standard for the use of compostable caddy liners in the FOGO stream.

2. Background

Council provides kerbside waste services to approximately 71,000 households in Merri-bek. The total number of households in Merri-bek is approximately 84,000.

Council has been working towards the introduction of a weekly FOGO and fortnightly rubbish collection for all serviced households since 2019. In 2020–2021 Council undertook three stages of community engagement to inform its Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy (adopted in December 2021). The 2021 decision envisaged that the switch to fortnightly rubbish collections as standard would happen in 2025 (pending trials and a final Council decision), thereby achieving the final stage of Council's reformed kerbside waste service. In July 2023, Council rolled out the four-bin service that introduced weekly FOGO collections and maintained weekly rubbish collections.

On balance, a fortnightly rubbish service is assessed as providing stronger outcomes in terms of cost (particularly given rising State Government waste levy charges), landfill diversion, emissions reduction, and operational feasibility. It is aligned with Merri-bek's policy and plans, and its success has been demonstrated by implementation in other metropolitan councils, and by Merri-bek's Trial. However, it is a material change for households, and for some households it can be a challenging change.

Growing pressure on Melbourne's landfill capacity

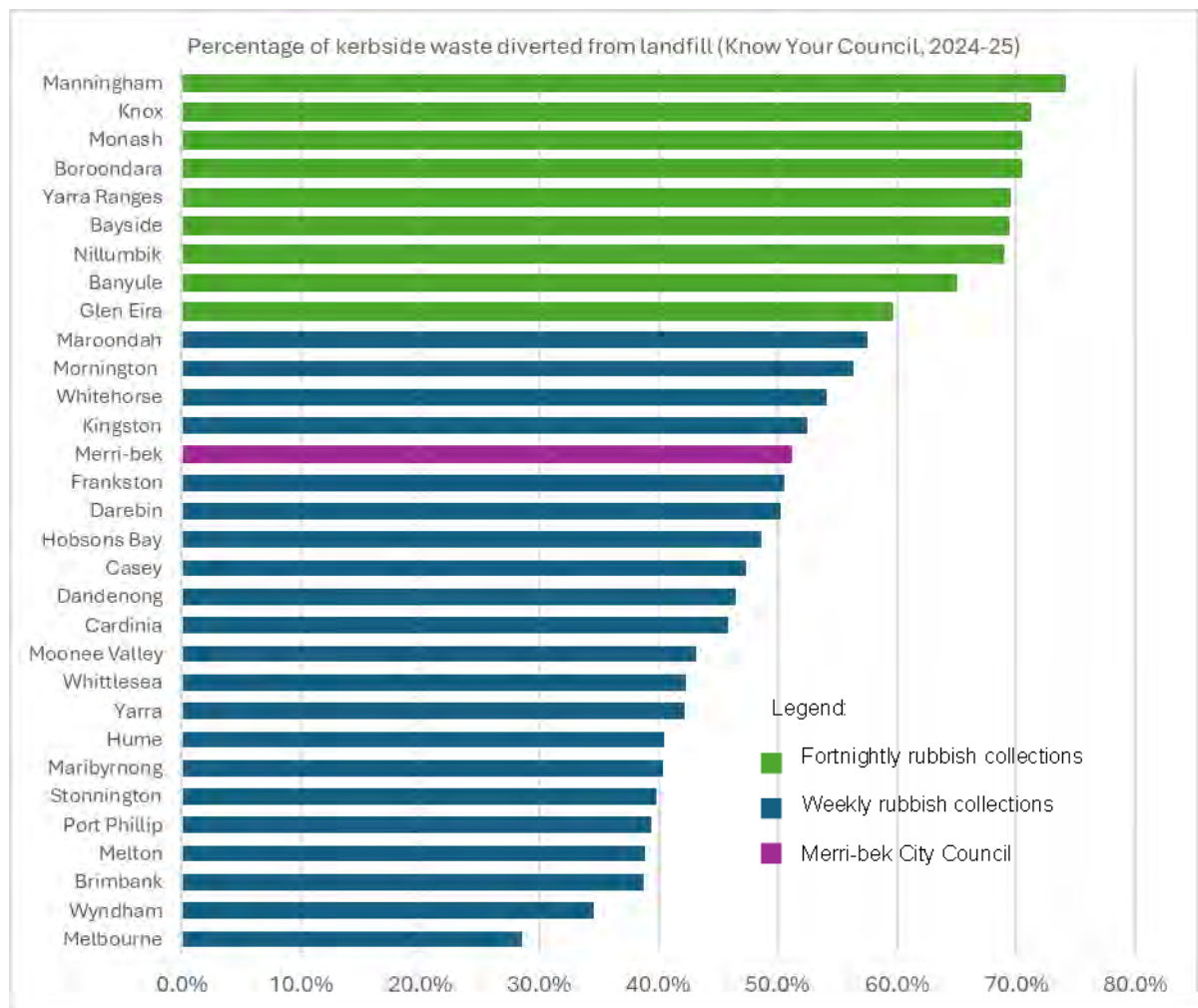
Victorian Government waste projections and infrastructure planning indicate that Melbourne's existing landfill capacity will come under significant pressure in the mid-to-late 2030s. Recycling Victoria projects that metropolitan and surrounding landfill capacity is expected to be exhausted around 2040 – with some local and regional capacity constraints emerging earlier. This is detailed in numerous Victorian Government publications, including for example the [Victorian Recycling Infrastructure Plan \(VRIP\) Annual Progress Report](#), or Infrastructure Victoria's estimates that [Victoria has landfill capacity until around 2039](#).

Fortnightly rubbish in other municipalities

As at May 2026, 26 Victorian councils have made the switch to fortnightly rubbish collections, with another three planned in 2026 and 2027. The nine metropolitan councils with fortnightly rubbish collections are achieving among the highest landfill diversion rates across the state – between 60 and 75 per cent (see **Figure 1**). Merri-bek is one of only three councils in the State to collect both FOGO and general rubbish bins every week.

Experience from other councils suggests that after a fortnightly rubbish service is introduced, community concern can reduce over time. It is important that the service is well supported, practical issues are addressed (including through careful mitigation of practical impacts for households), and the community is supported with clear information.

Figure 1. Victorian councils with the highest diversion rates have fortnightly rubbish



3. Issues

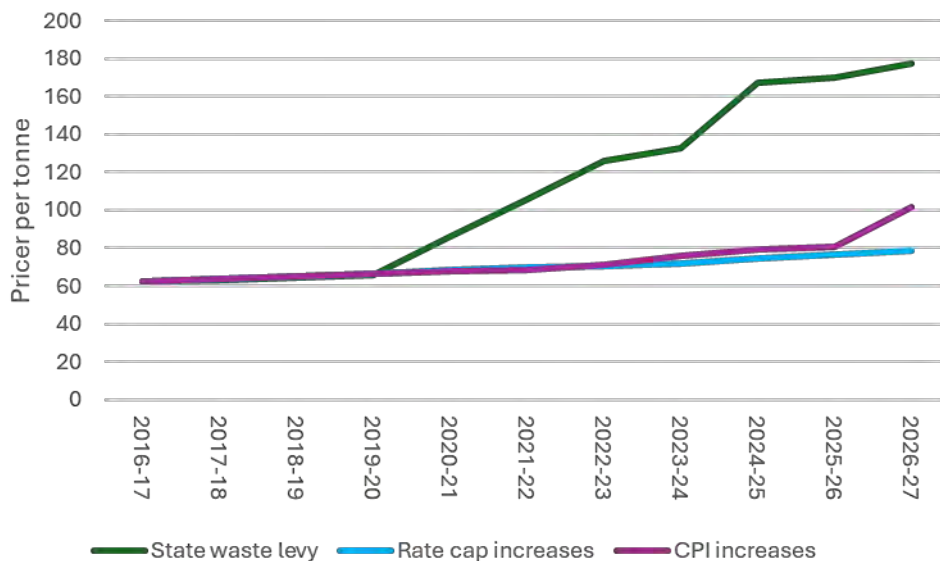
The growing cost of weekly rubbish collections

The potential cost savings to ratepayers of fortnightly rubbish collections, compared to weekly collections, are at least \$16 million over ten years, and there is potential for this to increase even more if all food waste is diverted from rubbish to the FOGO bin. This equates to between \$1.3 million to \$2.1 million in avoided household waste charges for ratepayers each year.

Waste services costs have increased rapidly, and the largest increase has been the State Government waste levy. Now almost \$180 per tonne, the levy has been rising rapidly since 2019 (see **Figure 2**). As all general rubbish is sent to landfill, this makes it by far the most expensive kerbside bin.

Council recovers the cost of providing all kerbside waste services through a waste charge to ratepayers. If we can reduce the volume of landfill, waste charges will be lower. Fortnightly rubbish collections reduce the cost of the service through reduced disposal and collection costs, thereby minimising the impact of rising landfill costs for ratepayers.

Figure 2. Victorian Government waste levy increases over past decade (price per tonne)



Council’s adopted waste and emissions reduction goals

In 2025, Council adopted several community goals for 2030 that are relevant to the consideration of fortnightly rubbish collections:

- **Halve FOGO going to landfill.** The community has reduced the amount of FOGO in rubbish bins from 36 per cent in 2021 down to 30 per cent in 2025. Much of this is food waste.
- **Divert 80 per cent of kerbside waste from landfill (without waste to energy).** Since the introduction of a weekly FOGO service in 2023, the municipality-wide diversion rate has improved from 48 per cent (2022-23) to 52 per cent (2024-25). The trial has demonstrated that fortnightly rubbish collections will significantly improve this outcome (with participants achieving 65 per cent diversion from landfill after only 6 months). Without fortnightly rubbish collections it is unclear how the community will move towards the goal of 80 per cent diversion.
- **Reduce community emissions by 75 per cent.** It is estimated the implementation of fortnightly rubbish collections would avoid between 1,500 to 3,200 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-e) emissions per year through diverting food waste from landfill.

Fortnightly rubbish collections are one of the most significant service levers currently available to Council to increase landfill diversion, improve food waste recovery and reduce waste-related emissions. Without this change, it is not clear there are sufficient alternative measures to achieve the adopted 80 per cent landfill diversion goal by 2030 – or the Victorian Government’s target to divert 80 per cent of waste (including kerbside, construction and commercial waste) by 2030.

Fortnightly rubbish Trial – purpose and evaluation

The fortnightly rubbish Trial aimed to test the anticipated benefits of fortnightly rubbish, the feasibility of delivering the service change in Merri-bek, community behaviour change (e.g. food waste separation) and the impact of potential unintended consequences (e.g. dumped rubbish, contamination).

The Trial started in July 2025 and involved approximately 3,000 households and businesses in parts of Hadfield and Brunswick/Brunswick West. Evaluation of the trial took place after six months, in December 2025.

First Person Consulting was engaged to help design and complete a detailed evaluation report (see **Attachment 2**). The evaluation considered whether the Trial delivered its intended benefits and identified any lessons for the future. Key sources of data included:

- Waste audits of 180 households in trial areas, before the Trial and after six months of fortnightly rubbish collections.
- 1,991 bin inspections to explore contamination, bin fullness and public bin use.
- Total weights from rubbish collection trucks used in the trial areas.
- Feedback from nine pop-up engagement activities in trial areas.
- Opt-in surveys of Trial participants before (n=133) and during (n=352) the Trial.
- Interviews of Trial participants (n=11) and staff (n=8) to explore any additional insights on the Trial implementation.
- Dumped rubbish data from across the trial areas and surrounds.
- Trial implementation records including bin allocations, financial modelling, customer service feedback and observations from Council's street cleansing team.

The Trial provides strong local evidence, with locations selected to understand its impact in diverse locations. However, a municipal-wide roll-out would involve a broader range of housing types, household sizes, cultural practices and waste behaviours. As a result, should Council proceed with a full roll out of fortnightly rubbish (Option 1 below), further implementation supports and policy adjustments are recommended.

Fortnightly rubbish Trial – key findings

While there were varied views about fortnightly rubbish collections from the Trial community overall, the Trial has successfully demonstrated that fortnightly rubbish collection is feasible and effective in Merri-bek. During the trial:

- Landfill decreased significantly. The average weight of rubbish bins collected each fortnight dropped by 19 per cent (from 14.1 kg to 11.4 kg per property per fortnight).
- Food waste in FOGO bins almost doubled (from 29 per cent to 56 per cent). The greatest improvement was in Hadfield, with food waste capture increasing 2.5 times (from 22 per cent to 56 per cent).
- The overall diversion rate (*the amount of waste diverted from landfill into recycling streams such as FOGO*) increased from 52 per cent to 65 per cent.
- While FOGO contamination has been a concern in other councils, the overall FOGO contamination rate did not change throughout the Trial, staying stable at 1 per cent.
- Around two-thirds (66 per cent) of survey respondents reported they had changed key waste-related behaviours as a result of the Trial, including using the FOGO bin, sorting recycling and being mindful of purchasing decisions.
- There was no evidence of an increase in the dumping of residential rubbish in public bins or other public places (see **Attachment 2**).
- Approximately four per cent of households accessed concessions (large family, medical, nappy, financial hardship) to increase the size of their rubbish bins at no extra cost.

Illegal dumping:

Data on public bin use and dumping in the Trial areas does not show any change attributable to the change in collection frequency (see **Attachment 2**), despite community concerns that this would occur.

Separately, however, longitudinal data across Merri-bek does indicate that dumped rubbish is a growing issue. This is consistent with trends across the wider metropolitan region. The sector-wide growth in dumped rubbish tends to relate to industrial and commercial waste, furniture, and larger items, rather than residential rubbish.

Sentiment:

A change to kerbside frequency is significant for many households, and sentiment changes are likely to take some time. However, the Trial demonstrated that once people adjusted to fortnightly rubbish collections, views began to become more positive. After just six months of the Trial, 37 per cent of survey respondents found the fortnightly collection to be 'easy' or 'very easy' – which was seven per cent more than in the pre-trial survey. Conversely, respondents finding the trial 'very difficult' or 'a little difficult' shifted down from 55 per cent pre-trial to 51 per cent after six months. This trend is expected to continue as people become familiar with the fortnightly collections and changes to behaviour become more of a habit and ongoing support is provided.

In terms of overall sentiment after the Trial, around 65 per cent of pop-up respondents from Brunswick/Brunswick West were positive about the prospect of fortnightly collections, and 33 per cent for Hadfield respondents. Conversely, 21 per cent of Brunswick pop up respondents were negative about the prospect of fortnightly collections, and 53 per cent of Hadfield respondents. One of the reasons the Trial was run in different suburbs was to understand different issues in different locations, with different demographics and household patterns across different parts of the municipality. The post-Trial sentiment feedback underscores the importance of any future roll-out including good supports (such as concessions for larger bins) for households that need them.

The main issues people reported with the transition to fortnightly rubbish collection were:

- Not having a big enough bin – data sources showed over half (57 per cent) of rubbish bins were being presented full and around two to ten per cent being regularly 'overfull'.
- Concerns over smell and cleanliness – relating to both putting food waste in the FOGO bins, as well as items such as nappies and pet waste in rubbish bins for up to two weeks.

The two key factors that appeared to drive how easily survey respondents adapted to the fortnightly collection were:

- Household size – larger households found the fortnightly collection more difficult.
- Location – respondents from Hadfield were more likely to report fortnightly rubbish collections as being difficult, compared to respondents from Brunswick/Brunswick West. However, the system performance (diversion and contamination rates) was similar across all locations, so sentiment is not an indicator of system outcomes.

Municipality-wide community engagement – key findings

In addition to the Trial evaluation, Council undertook an eight-week community engagement from 1 March to 26 April 2026. This was designed to hear feedback from the entire Merri-bek community and stakeholders on the proposed change to fortnightly rubbish collections (detailed at **Attachment 1**).

Key concerns

A number of practical concerns and concerns around potential impacts were raised across the community. If a fortnightly service is rolled out, these would need to be addressed with real-world solutions and clear communications. They include:

- Smell, pests and hygiene, particularly in warmer weather.
- Adequate solutions for households who generate additional waste (nappies, pets, medical, large households).
- Overflowing bins and dumping causing more public litter.
- Options for when increased waste is generated (e.g. celebrations, spring cleans) or when people forget to put their bin out.
- Solutions for properties with limited bin storage space.
- Solutions for apartment buildings, to address neighbours dumping in others' bins, or fair use of shared bins.
- Cost implications, particularly for households who need non-standard bin sizes.
- The option for households to keep smaller bins (with a cost saving) if they do not need a larger bin or have concerns about moving larger bins.

A recurring theme throughout the engagement was respondents saying they could personally manage the service change but were concerned that other households may struggle to adapt, resulting in contamination, overflowing bins or dumped rubbish. Interestingly and as noted elsewhere, these outcomes were not observed in the trial data, although they remain important concerns to manage through implementation.

The survey asked respondents to indicate which of a range of supports council could offer which they would most value. The most popular options for how council could support people were:

- Different rubbish bin sizes.
- Information on how to manage smell and hygiene.
- Reminders about bin days.

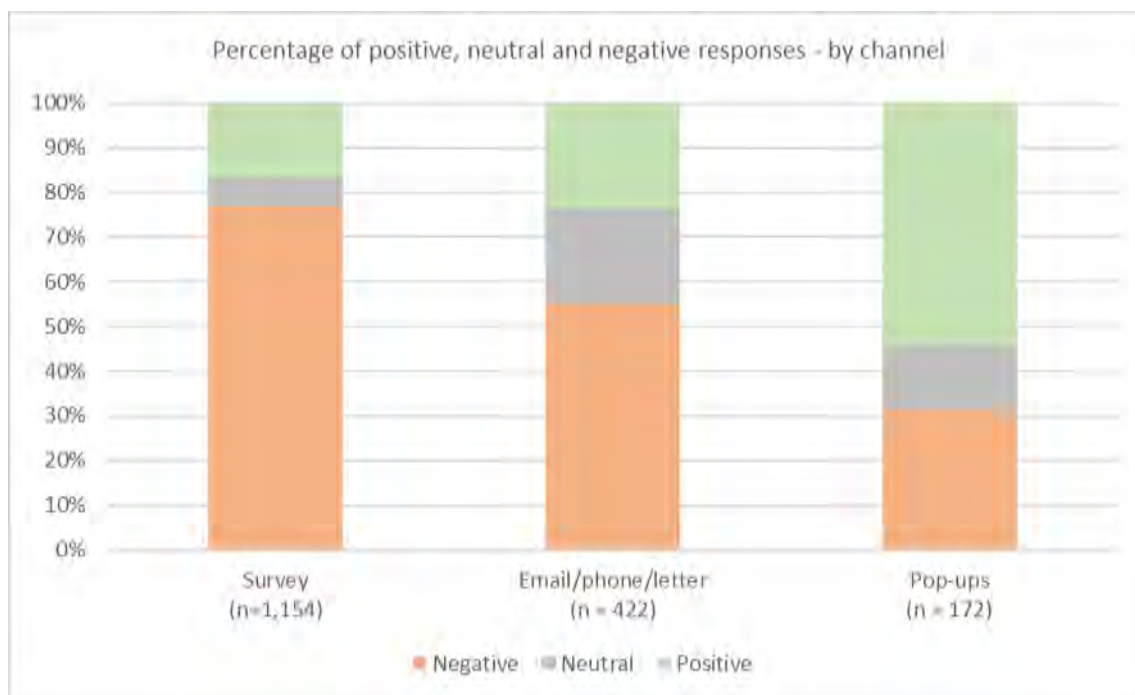
Sentiment

Community sentiment varied depending on the engagement channel (see **Figure 3**). The transition to fortnightly rubbish collections represents a significant service change for the community. As expected, community sentiment included opposition and uncertainty from some residents, alongside support or acceptance from others.

Across the three channels:

- 77 per cent of opt-in survey respondents indicated negative sentiment towards the proposed change to fortnightly rubbish collections. Households with children in nappies and larger households (5+ people) were more likely to express negative sentiment, compared to older adults and smaller households without children.
- 55 per cent of people who submitted feedback via email, phone or letter expressed negative sentiment towards the proposed change.
- Participants at the place-based pop-ups across the municipality were generally more positive towards fortnightly rubbish. Around 54 per cent of pop-up participants expressed positive sentiment towards a fortnightly rubbish service, compared to 34 per cent negative.

Figure 3. Overall community sentiment about fortnightly rubbish collections



Options

Based on the financial and environmental implications, and Trial and community engagement outcomes outlined above, **two options for Council's general rubbish service are proposed below**. The decision before Council involves a trade-off between stronger financial and environmental outcomes under Option 1 and maintaining current service expectations under Option 2. Option 1 would require careful implementation and targeted supports to address community concerns. Option 2 would avoid the municipality-wide service change, but would not realise the same forecast savings, landfill diversion or emissions reduction benefits.

OPTION 1 – transition to fortnightly rubbish service with policy adjustments

Option 1 would complete the final stage of Council's adopted kerbside waste reform program, while modifying the service model in response to trial findings and community feedback. The proposed changes, including a larger standard rubbish bin, expanded maximum capacity, tailored support for multi-unit developments, accessible concessions and additional outreach, are intended to address the key practical concerns raised through engagement while still achieving the financial and environmental benefits of fortnightly rubbish collections.

In response to trial learnings and community feedback, updates to the *Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy* are recommended to further support the community to successfully adapt to the service change:

- Increase the standard rubbish bin to 140 litres (instead of 120 litres).
- Increase the maximum volume for rubbish to 480 litres per fortnight (instead of 360 litres in the Trial), with an associated increase in the waste charge multiplier. *Also see Human Rights and Gender Equity Consideration section for commentary on this.*
- Provide ad hoc rubbish collections for a fee on an as-needed basis (instead of an annual fee option for ongoing weekly rubbish collections).
- Rename the Financial Hardship concession to a Pensioner Concession, applicable to rubbish and FOGO bins, and streamline eligibility to align with the Municipal Rates Concession.

- Provide weekly rubbish collection service, with adjusted charge, for large apartment buildings (e.g. 20+ households) where Council deems that fortnightly rubbish is not viable.
- Provide operational discretion for delegated Officers to make manageable service adjustments for case-by-case exceptional circumstances, including on compassionate grounds.

In addition to the above Policy amendments, a range of additional implementation measures are proposed as part of Option 1. These respond to Trial learnings, community feedback and the project's Gender and Equity Impact Assessment (GEIA) and include:

- Ensure concessions (larger bin at no extra cost) are easily accessible to those who need them.
- Provide 'bin ordering window' in late 2026, allowing households to choose to keep their existing small size bin (i.e. 80 litres), rather than receive a default bin upsize.
- Extend the program to provide review and adjustments and educational support to bin set-ups at town houses, units and apartment buildings (on request), to ensure tailored set-up for fortnightly rubbish.
- Establish a digital opt-in electronic reminder for bin night (e.g. SMS message with 'which bins go out this week') as a complement to online and printed waste calendars.
- Maximise education programs and messaging to address smell, hygiene and pests concerns with the community.
- Collaborate with State Government and other Councils to explore better ways of managing illegally dumped waste.

OPTION 2 – maintain weekly rubbish collections and conclude the Trial

Alternatively, Council could decide not to proceed with municipality-wide fortnightly rubbish collections and continue with the current service model of weekly general rubbish and FOGO collections.

Option 2 would retain the current weekly rubbish collection service, responding to community concern and avoiding the immediate disruption associated with a municipal-wide service change. This option would maintain the current level of service convenience for households, particularly those with higher rubbish needs. However, it would not realise the forecast financial, landfill diversion, food waste recovery and emissions reduction benefits of Option 1. Council would also need to identify alternative measures to progress its adopted waste diversion targets.

Should Council choose Option 2, it is recommended that fortnightly rubbish trial areas revert to weekly collections. The trial will have informed Council's decision, but the longer term financial and environmental benefits will not be realised.

Other options

In reviewing feedback, a range of other options were considered but are not recommended, for a range of legal, equity, risk profile and operational considerations. These include opt-in and seasonal models (which are costly to ratepayers and operationally difficult, to impossible), extending the current trial, delaying implementation to 2028, and consideration of staged geographical roll out. As these options are not recommended for the reasons outlined above, they are not further assessed in this report.

Compostable liners for FOGO caddies

One issue that continues to be raised is liners for food waste caddies. Caddy liners help to contain food products and smells both inside the caddy and when placed in the FOGO bin outside.

There is currently no standard for compostable liners, and different organics processors have different practices. The Victorian government released draft statewide household waste and recycling service standards in 2024, which did not include compostable plastic liners. It is understood that they may still be under consideration, but the final standards have not been released.

In the meantime, Council's organics processor does not accept compostable plastic liners. Council has previously trialled paper liners and this may be an option to revisit while we wait to understand the state landscape. Council will also prioritise the option for households to use compostable plastic or paper caddy liners in the service specification when the service is tendered in the coming years.

Legal and risk considerations

The following legal and risk matters have been considered in the preparation of this report:

- Council has an obligation to change general rubbish bins to red lids by 2027 to comply with State Government legislation and service standards.
- The collection contract for the southside service needs to confirm rubbish frequency for July 2027 onwards, prior to its final execution.
- To commence fortnightly rubbish by July 2027, Council would need to make a preliminary bin order by August 2026 and finalise it by December 2026. A modelled estimate could be used for the preliminary order in August, and community members would need to confirm their individual household bin orders during October and November 2026.

Human rights and gender equity considerations

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the Gender Equality Act 2020. No Human Rights impacts are identified. Under the Gender Equality Act 2020 Council has a duty to promote gender equality in policies, programs and services with a direct and significant impact on the community. This includes gender and equity impact assessment which considers how the proposed fortnightly rubbish service and Policy support measures will:

- meet the needs of people of different genders
- address gender inequality
- promote gender equality.

The *Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy* was informed by an initial gender impact assessment and included a range of equity and social justice measures. The fortnightly rubbish trial and community engagement provided the opportunity for Council to hear from a diversity of residents across Merri-bek. As noted in Section 4, the engagement process had a focus on seeking feedback from residents that might be more impacted by the change. The GEIA supported three recommended actions for integration into the project:

1. Adjustment of the Policy to provide for operational discretion for delegated Officers to make reasonable service adjustments for case-by-case 'exceptional circumstances', beyond the available concessions. This action will provide a means to better address the circumstances of households experiencing significant financial or logistical hardship in relation to their waste management and can also be exercised on compassionate grounds.

2. Establishment of a dedicated outreach role to focus on community waste education and support, with a particular focus on engaging multicultural communities.
3. Increase maximum bin volume capacity to 480 litres (2 x 240-litre bins) to support those already with the maximum 240-litre size for medical or other reasons, resulting in no reduction in capacity with fortnightly rubbish collections.

These recommendations work to meet the needs of priority groups and supplement existing Policy supports and subsidies that are in place to foster waste avoidance. These existing supports include, for example, discounts on purchase of home composting/worm farming equipment, reusable cloth nappies, period products and incontinence products.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Council has undertaken extensive community engagement about kerbside waste reforms going back to 2019. Two final engagements were held over the last six months, one with Trial participants to assist in an evaluation of the trial in late 2025, and a broader community engagement in March and April 2026. The purpose of recent community engagement was to communicate and improve understanding of the proposed change to fortnightly rubbish collections, seek feedback on strategies to support the service change, and gain insight into current sentiment, lived experience and the perceived impacts of the proposed change.

Community feedback was captured through a range of channels including a survey (hard copy and digital), seven place-based pop-ups, four focus groups with affected cohorts and submissions/feedback received via email, phone or letter.

The engagement sought to engage the entire community and had a particular focus on reaching hard-to-reach and particularly affected stakeholders (e.g. larger households, households with nappies, multicultural communities, older persons). Engagement was promoted via a municipal-wide mailout to waste service users, as well as through Council's broadcast communications channels and networks.

There were 1,846 feedback points recorded across all engagement activities. This included 1,154 survey responses (online and hard copy), 235 participants at place-based pop-ups, 35 focus group participants and over 420 email, phone or letter submissions. We heard from a broad range of community members across an array of different demographics including age, gender, suburb, diversity markers, housing type and household size. (See **Attachment 1** for more detail).

Communications

Community engagement was promoted via direct mail (74,190 service users), Community News (84,000 properties), social media posts, email campaigns, Community Connectors, stakeholder reference groups and advisory committees, posters in customer service centres, on-hold phone messages, and other channels.

In addition to engagement through Council's formal channels, many people participated in social media conversations on community groups and posts.

Some messages were impacted by initial conflicting messaging in Council's communication, as well as some Protected Industrial Action impacting some waste collections north of Bell Street for several weeks in April.

5. Officer declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and resources implications

The costs of the kerbside waste service is passed on directly to ratepayers via the annual waste charge. This is calculated based on the cost of each stream of waste (general rubbish, mixed recycling, food and garden organics and glass recycling), with a multiplier based on bin size.

Council's proposed waste service charge rates are published as part of the draft budget which is released for community consultation each year. The proposed fees and charges for 2026-27 reflect the current service which will be in place for the entire 2026-27 financial year.

However, indicative financial and resource implications for each Option are outlined below. These would be reflected in the draft 2027-28 budget when it is released for community consultation in around March 2027. These estimates are indicative and subject to change if Council's costs change over the next year, for example as a result of fuel price increases.

Under State Government requirements, all Victorian councils must provide households with access to a standardised four-stream waste and recycling system by 1 July 2027. Merri-bek has already implemented the required four kerbside waste and recycling streams. To complete the required bin-standardisation process, general rubbish bins must also be changed to red lids by 1 July 2027. This one-off cost of around \$3.1 million is required under both Option 1 and Option 2 and would be depreciated over ten years.

The required red-lid changeover provides an opportunity to coordinate bin changes, should Council decide to proceed with Option 1, reducing duplication, cost, and avoiding a second major bin changeover process.

Option 1 (transition to fortnightly rubbish as standard in July 2027)

- The cost of up-sizing to 140 L bins (from 80 L bins), is estimated to be in the order of \$1.2 million.
- Council forecasts annual savings in the first year to be in the order of \$1.3 million. Over the next ten years this could grow to cumulative savings of at least \$16 million as a result of a reduction in sending waste to landfill.

Option 2 (maintain weekly rubbish collections)

- It would cost up to \$0.5 million to replace the larger bins that have been rolled out in Trial areas.
- There would be no material reduction in landfill volumes, so there would be no material financial savings.

7. Implementation

Pending Council's decision, the next steps include:

1. Communicating Council's decision to the community.
2. If Option 1 is endorsed, delivering an intensive communications and behaviour change plan for the twelve months leading up to and following the service change.
3. If Option 2 is endorsed, wrapping up the trial and returning trial areas to weekly rubbish collections, returning bins and ending any trial area fortnightly concessions.
4. If Option 1 is endorsed, preparing for operational changes including bin orders, and updating administrative and operational procedures/processes.
5. Updating the *Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy* to reflect Council's decision.

Attachment/s

- 1 [↓](#) Fortnightly Rubbish Engagement - Engagement Findings Report D26/236621
- 2 [↓](#) Fortnightly Rubbish Trial - Evaluation Report D26/225800



City of Merri-bek
Fortnightly Rubbish Collections
Engagement Findings Report

27 May 2026-Final



Acknowledgement

ChatterBox Projects and partners respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which this project was undertaken, known today as Merri-bek. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country, culture and community.

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Partners

This report has been produced by ASDF Research, using feedback collected by Merri-bek Council and findings from focus groups and place-based engagement conducted by ChatterBox Projects.



1. Executive Summary






This report presents a summary of a range of community engagement activities seeking to understand the supports people may need if moving to a fortnightly rubbish collection service, while also gaining insight into current sentiment, lived experience and the perceived impacts of the service.

1.1 Engagement activities – what we did

Communication activities	Distribution
Visitors to engagement page	11,788
Direct mail-out	74,190
Email campaign click throughs	677
Engagement with social media posts	556
Downloads (paper survey, trial outcomes, policy, trial evaluation report)	1,560
TOTAL	88,771

1.2 Participation – how many participants provided feedback

Council's promotional campaign and efforts to inform the community achieved significant reach, including:

	The engagement activities were effective in obtaining feedback from approximately 1,846 participants in total across all engagement methods
	1,154 survey responses (online and hard copy)
	235 participants at the seven place-based pop-up engagement events
	35 residents attending one of the four focus groups
	422 submissions (email, phone or letter)



1.3 Participation profile – who we heard from

This profile is drawn from information provided by survey participants unless otherwise indicated.

- 42% under 45, 31% 45-64, 10% 65+
- 53% women, 32% men, 1% non-binary
- 37% work from home, 30% with children in nappies, 12% with a medical condition that produces additional waste
- 51% separate house, 28% townhouse or unit, 20% apartment
- 35% with children, 52% single or couple without children
- 39% from larger households, with 4 or more people
- 35% speak a language other than English

1.4 Key findings

The purpose of these engagement activities was to seek community feedback on proposed support strategies associated with the implementation of fortnightly rubbish collection, rather than to measure overall community support or opposition to the decision itself. However, it should be noted that through the engagement activities there was a significant segment of respondents expressing opposition to the transition to fortnightly rubbish collection, with many voicing frustration about the framing of the research questions (not providing an opportunity to influence the decision). As this engagement was not designed to measure support for or against the proposed change, and participation was self-selected rather than based on a representative sample, the results should not be interpreted as a statistically reliable measure of broader community sentiment regarding the introduction of fortnightly collection.

Should Council decide to transition to fortnightly rubbish collection, the main concerns that will need to be addressed with real-world solutions and clear communications are:

- Smell and hygiene, particularly in warmer weather and for households whose bins are stored close to the residence.
- Pests (mice, maggots etc).
- Adequate solutions for households who generate additional waste (nappies, pets, medical, large households).
- Overflow and dumping causing more public litter.
- Periods when increased waste is generated (e.g. celebrations).
- Solutions for those on properties with limited bin storage space.
- Solutions for apartment buildings, to address neighbours dumping in others' bins, or fair use of shared bins.
- Solutions for those who forget to put their bin out.
- Cost implications, particularly for households who wish to have a non-standard mix of bin sizes.
- Option for households to keep smaller bins (with a cost saving) due to lack of need for a larger bin, or concerns about moving larger bins.

There was a general theme throughout the engagement activities that some people think they will be OK themselves, but they are concerned that others won't do the right thing, leading to contamination, more overflowing bins and dumping of rubbish.



Sentiment

Respondents and participants were given the opportunity to indicate their sentiment towards fortnightly rubbish collection. It should be noted that given the method of promotion of the engagement activities, this feedback cannot be interpreted as representative of the broader community, but rather provides an overview of the sentiment of those who chose to participate. The main findings were that when using a scale of 5 faces from a red frown through to a dark green smile:

- 68% of online survey respondents chose the red frown both at the start and the end of the survey. When generating means out of 5 (where red frown was 1 through to dark green smile as 5) more positive sentiment was recorded amongst older adults and smaller households without children. Negative sentiment was more common amongst households with children in nappies and larger households.
- Only 19% of participants at the pop-up events chose the red frown, with 37% choosing the dark green smile.

In the email, phone and letter submissions, 55% were registering opposition to the change to fortnightly rubbish collection, 21% were seeking further information and 23% expressed positive sentiment.

Current behaviours

Most of those who participated in the survey indicated that their general rubbish bin was usually full each week (70%); this is in line with bin audits conducted by Council¹. Engagement participants indicated that the most common types of waste placed in the general rubbish bin were nappies, soft plastics and food containers, and pet waste (kitty litter and dog poo).

Most survey respondents said they use their green bin for food scraps, and those that don't said they will often use other disposal methods for their food waste (composting, worm farm etc.). The barriers to uptake of placing food waste in the green bin were primarily not knowing what can go in the food and garden organics (FOGO) bin, and not having room for food waste due to the FOGO bin being full from garden waste. There was also a common perception that doing so would result in smell, hygiene and pest issues.

Supports

From the list of supports put forth in the survey, the most popular options were:

- Different rubbish bin sizes. Comments throughout the engagement suggests this includes adaptive bin size options to cater for those who need larger bins, but also those who want to keep their smaller bins (due to lack of space and/or lack of need). This can apply to general waste as well as recycling and green waste bin sizes.
- Information on how to manage smell and hygiene.
- Reminders about bin days.

¹ 2025, Kerbside Bin Audit 2025 Merri-bek City Council, Knowwaste. 75.28% of the 89.08% presented bins were full = 67% of all bins full each week.



Other ideas for things that could be done to assist with adapting to the proposed change to fortnightly rubbish bin collection were:

In the home:

- Reduce packaging (although most want this to be led by industry)
- Composting

In the neighbourhood:

- Shared bin space with neighbours
- Communal shared bins
- Public bins

Council supports:

- Bigger bins
- Reduce rates
- Free waste collection points
- More education
- Bags for FOGO (allow them, and provide them for free)
- Smaller bins for those who want them
- Soft Plastics recycling
- Broader concession scope
- Transparency with regards to decision-making data
- Increase recycling collection frequency
- FOGO bin cleaning service
- Reminders
- Kitchen caddy for FOGO
- Advocate for reduced packaging

Household needs

Through the engagement activities a range of specific challenges or needs were identified for particular households:

- Some smaller households / those who already generate less waste want to keep the smaller bin size.
- It could be difficult for renters to get larger bins if they cost money (landlords won't pay), and/or the kitchen caddy may not be left by the previous tenants.
- Households with small children who use nappies raised concern that bins will fill up quickly and smell if only collected every fortnight.
- Higher density households may face challenges with neighbour misuse and smell due to not having bin storage locations available further from residences.
- Residences on smaller blocks not having suitable space (not enough space available for larger bins, or no storage space further away from the building to cater for increased smell).
- Those with increased medical waste needs were concerned about hygiene and smell.
- Those with pets raised concerns about potential smell from longer-term storage of kitty litter and dog poo. Some queried if these could be included in the FOGO bin.



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2. Introduction

Merri-bek City Council (Council) is proposing to introduce fortnightly rubbish collections (with the aim of starting this service change in July 2027). Getting to this point has involved several years of community education and engagement as well as staged service changes, including the introduction of the four-bin system and weekly food and garden organics (FOGO) collections. All of these changes have been aimed at reducing waste to landfill, improving environmental outcomes and reducing costs.

In 2025, Council trialled fortnightly rubbish collections in parts of Brunswick, Brunswick West and Hadfield to test operational impacts, waste diversion and community experience ahead of any broader rollout.

Community engagement on the proposed change was undertaken over 8 weeks, from 1 March to 26 April 2026. This report presents the findings of community engagement which aimed to communicate changes to rubbish collections, improve understanding of waste services and waste reduction, and seek input on the supports people may need, while also gaining insight into current sentiment, lived experience and the perceived impacts of the service.

Council provides kerbside waste services to approximately 71,000 households (or 85%) of residential properties in Merri-bek,. A further 3,800 non-residential properties also access Council's kerbside waste service.



3. How we promoted the engagement

The survey and focus group invitation were promoted broadly within the community:

- 5 posts on Facebook
- 5 posts on Instagram
- Email to 5,018 residents registered within the engagement portal
- Direct mailout – 4-page A4 flyer with translations in 10 languages - 74,190 properties (landed in mailboxes from 12 March)
- Merri-bek Community News (distributed municipal-wide from mid-March)
- Posters and flyers at Council venues
- Merri-bek website news story
- Council e-newsletters
- Display screens at Council venues
- Phone on hold message
- Direct networks
 - Advisory committees and reference groups
 - Service provider networks
 - In home support
 - Aged and Community Support services
 - Merri-bek Libraries
- Community events during engagement period
 - Sydney Rd Street Party, Brunswick
 - Understanding My Age Care community information session, Coburg
 - Coburg Farmers Market

Communication activities	Distribution
Visitors to engagement page	11,788
Direct mail-out	74,190
Email campaign click throughs	677
Engagement with social media posts	556
Downloads (paper survey, trial outcomes, policy, evaluation report)	1,560
TOTAL	88,771

There were page views in languages other than English on the engagement website as follows:

- Turkish, 206 page views
- Urdu, 189 page views
- Vietnamese, 182 page views
- Nepali, 156 page views
- Italian, 135 page views
- Spanish, 120 page views



- Hindi, 111 page views
- Greek, 102 page views
- Arabic, 36 page views

It is important to note that compared to other Merri-bek engagements, it was observed by Council that there was minimal engagement with the information elements of the project page (e.g. very few people went to FAQs) which is often evident in the comments (e.g. misunderstanding of scope or proposed changes).

An additional pop-up was added in Bonwick St, Fawkner to provide further engagement opportunity due to earlier pop-ups rescheduled because of extreme weather.

Emails, phone calls and letters were mostly received through the Waste Projects inbox or Customer Service call centre, with 369 emails, 52 phone calls and 1 letter received.

Overall, there were over 1,800 participants through these various channels. Some individuals may have participated in more than one engagement activity (e.g. survey and email).

Engagement activities	Participation
Survey (online and hard copy)	1,154
Focus groups (x4)	35
Email and phone	422
Popups (x7)	235
TOTAL	1,846

There were also hundreds of social media comments made on the 5 posts made by Council on each of Instagram and Facebook. Whilst these can't be considered as formal submissions (interested parties were provided with an online survey to provide their feedback, and indeed many of these may have completed the survey) the general themes raised in these comments have been noted.

- Instagram: 326 comments made by 160 individuals
- Facebook: 757 comments made by 396 individuals

4.1 Constraints and considerations

There were a range of constraints and considerations that may have impacted on feedback received through the engagement:

- Misconceptions around communications – some thought all bins were being moved to fortnightly collection.
- Early in the engagement period, communications were affected by a change in messaging from 'we will do this' to 'we propose to do this'.
- There was industrial action between 7 and 21 April that impacted on kerbside bin collections north of Bell Street.



- Other Councils started advocacy on glass bins (advocating for removal) which may have caused some residents to think that the glass bins were Council's decision (rather than a State Government mandate).
- Widespread media coverage, as outlined in Appendix 3.



4. How to read this document

This report summarises key feedback from engagement activities and does not preclude the Council project team from considering community feedback in its original format.

It is important to note that the survey results may not reflect the broader community view, as people with concerns about the topic may have been more motivated to respond.

5.1 Thematic analysis

For the questions collecting a written answer, responses have been grouped into meaningful themes to assist with analysis. Where relevant, individual comments have been assigned to multiple themes. An excel document with this thematic analysis has been provided separately and allows for filtering of comments by themes.

5.2 Statistical significance testing

Results have been tested for statistical significance using the Bonferroni method at 95% confidence level and takes into account the effective base for improved accuracy. Where a statistically significant variation has been identified in the analysis, this has been included in the analysis. To ensure relevance and usefulness of this report, cross analysis of variables which do not yield any statistically significant insights have not been included in the written analysis.

All findings have had significance testing conducted based on:

- Gender
- Age
- Region (see page 17)
- Diversity
- Household characteristics
- Household size
- House type
- Household composition
- Participation in trial

5.3 Glossary

CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse (born overseas or speak a language other than English)
n=	The number of respondents who contributed to the reported percentages (base number)
Respondent	Those who participated in the survey.
Sample size	The number of people who provided an answer to the question.



5. Who we heard from

The distribution for this research was not designed to reach a representative mix of people, instead it aimed to provide a wide range of interested parties with the opportunity to have their say.

6.1 Age

Age was recorded within the online survey as year of birth. This has been extrapolated into age ranges using the formula =2026-[year of birth].

Age range	n=	%	2026 Forecast % of 15+ in Merri-bek
14-24	10	1%	14%
25-34	150	13%	25%
35-44	318	28%	22%
45-54	217	19%	13%
55-64	134	12%	11%
65-74	69	6%	7%
75+	42	4%	8%
No answer	214	19%	

Forecast source: Proportion of 15+ year old Merri-bek population forecast to be within each age range in 2026 as per Victoria in Future estimates <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/Data-spatial-and-insights/discover-and-access-planning-open-data/victoria-in-future>

Through pop-ups there were at least 5 under 18 year olds.

In the emails, phone calls and letters 9 submissions indicated their age, of whom 7 were aged 65 years or over.

6.2 Gender

The proportion of online survey respondents who indicated they were a woman or girl is relatively in line with the population. However, the proportion of survey respondents who said they were male is significantly lower, with 14% of respondents choosing not to provide an answer.

Gender	n=	%	2026 Forecast % of 15+ in Merri-bek
Woman / girl	610	53%	51%
Man / boy	374	32%	49%
Non-binary	13	1%	
No answer	157	14%	

Forecast source: Proportion of 15+ year old Merri-bek population forecast to be within each gender in 2026 as per Victoria in Future estimates <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/Data-spatial-and-insights/discover-and-access-planning-open-data/victoria-in-future>

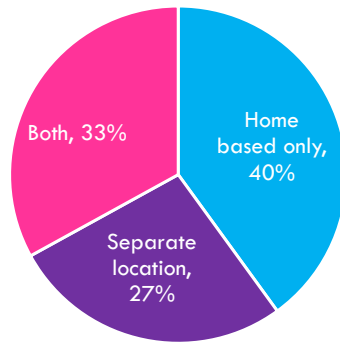


6.3 Connection to Merri-bek

Almost all survey respondents (99%) indicated they were residents, with 4% saying they operate a business in Merri-bek (all who were residents as well), and 1% indicating no connection.

Of the 52 respondents who said they operate a business, 40% said their business was home-based only.

Location of business (n=52)

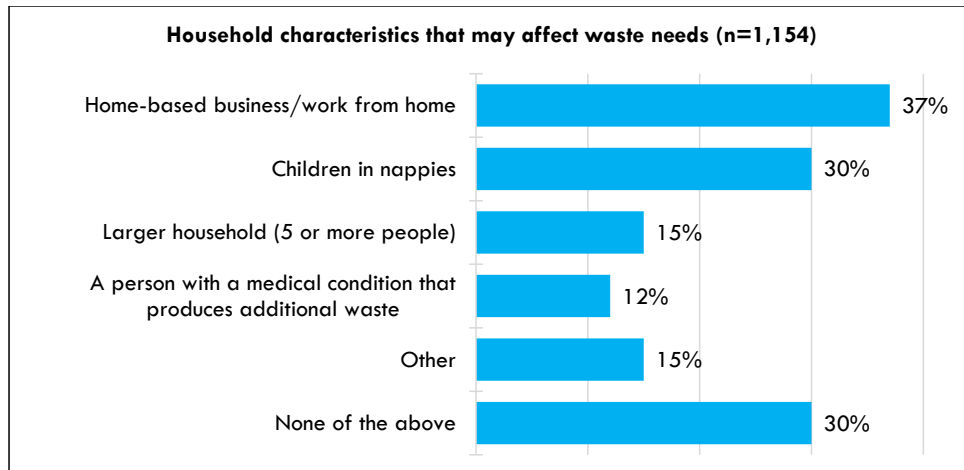


In the email, phone and letter submissions, 8 people indicated they were from a business.

6.4 Things that impact on waste needs

70% of respondents said their household had a characteristic that could impact on waste needs. In the survey analysis, key questions have been analysed by those who fall within these high need groups.

Household characteristics that may affect waste needs (n=1,154)



Other comments commonly mentioned:

- Pet waste (6%)
- Lack of room for more/larger bins (1%)



In the email, phone and letter submissions there were some submissions with enough detail to identify that they had one of these characteristics:

- Multiple unit dwellings n=34
- Nappies n=58
- Medical n=36
- Large family n=23

6.5 Type of home

In the online survey, most respondents indicated that they live in a separate house.

Type of home	n=	%	2021 Census
Separate house	736	64%	51%
Townhouse / unit / villa	334	29%	28%
Apartment	35	3%	20%
Other	24	2%	1%
Prefer not to say	25	2%	0%

In the email, phone and letter submissions, 74 people indicated their type of home, with 38 in a separate house and 32 in a townhouse, unit or villa. The remaining 4 were from apartments.

6.6 Household type

In the online survey more than half of respondents indicated that they have children living at home (53%). When compared to household types in Merri-bek it is clear that the sample includes an over-representation of responses from people with children. This likely has an impact on the overall findings as households with children sometimes have specific needs in terms of waste management (e.g. nappies).

Household	n=	%	2021 Census
Youngest under 4	294	26%	
Youngest 5-7 years	240	21%	
Youngest 18+	68	6%	
<i>NET with children</i>	602	53%	35%
Single or couple with no children	310	27%	52%
Group	88	8%	8%
Other	25	2%	4%
Prefer not to say	129	11%	



In the email, phone and letter submissions, 25 people indicated their household type, with 15 saying they are single or a couple with no children and 6 from households with the youngest child under the age of 4.

6.7 Size of household

In the online survey almost four in ten respondents (39%) were from households with 4 or more people. When compared to average household sizes for Merri-bek it is clear that the sample includes an over-representation of responses from people in larger households. This likely has an impact on the overall findings as larger households can generate more waste, which may result in concerns about reduced collection frequency.

Household	n=	%	2021 Census
1 person	89	8%	30%
2-3 people	507	44%	49%
4-5 people	424	37%	19%
6 or more people	28	2%	2%
Prefer not to say	106	9%	

In the email, phone and letter submissions, 38 people indicated their household size, with 11 one person households and 20 with 4 or more people.

6.8 Participation in trial

In the online survey only 4% indicated they had participated in Council’s fortnightly rubbish trial (n=42). There were 6 email submissions from people who said they had participated in the trial.



6.9 Suburb

Although the online survey was not designed to be a representative survey, respondents were distributed across suburbs relatively in line with population distribution.

Suburb	Survey		Email / phone / letter*		2021 Census
	n=	%	n=	%	
Brunswick	160	14%	41	23%	15%
Brunswick East (incl. Sumner)	65	6%	14	8%	8%
Brunswick West	72	6%	15	9%	9%
Coburg (incl. Moreland)	200	17%	26	15%	16%
Coburg North	65	6%	2	1%	5%
Fawkner	74	6%	8	5%	8%
Fitzroy North	7	1%	-	-	1%
Glenroy	121	11%	21	12%	14%
Gowanbrae	20	2%	7	4%	2%
Hadfield	31	3%	8	5%	4%
Oak Park	55	5%	8	5%	4%
Pascoe Vale	166	14%	13	8%	11%
Pascoe Vale South	66	6%	11	6%	6%
Tullamarine	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Outside of Merri-bek	26	2%			
Interstate / overseas	12	1%			
No answer	14	1%			

* of those who provided this information, n=174

6.10 Region

For the purpose of cross-analysis, and labelling of comments within this report, suburbs were grouped into the following regions.

North (n=532)	Central (n=266)	South (n=304)
Coburg North Fawkner Glenroy Gowanbrae Hadfield Oak Park Pascoe Vale Tullamarine	Coburg Pascoe Vale South	Brunswick Brunswick East Brunswick West Fitzroy North



6.11 Diversity

In the online survey responses were received from a wide range of cultural groups and life experiences.

For cross-analysis a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) category has been created which includes those who were born overseas or speak a language other than English at home (n=145).

Only 68% of respondents who said in the household type question that they have children in their household selected 'parent or guardian of children', suggesting that this measure is likely incorrect. Therefore when analysing data by children in the household the earlier question (household type) has been used for improved accuracy.

Categories with more than n=50 sample have been included in cross analysis.

Diversity	n=	%	2021 Census
Born overseas	94	8%	33%
Speak a language other than English	79	7%	35%
A person living with a disability	50	4%	6%
Carer for a person living with a disability	25	2%	11%
LGBTIQA+	53	5%	
Parent or guardian of children	233	20%	
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	13	1%	1%

6.12 Businesses

Of the businesses who participated in the online survey who said their business was at a location separate to their home (n=28), 18 (64%) said their business uses the Council waste collection service.

Of these 18 businesses, most were located in Brunswick (8) or Coburg (3).



6. What we heard

When viewing these results, it is important to bear in mind that the distribution of the online survey was not designed to be representative of the broader community, but instead was available to those who wished to share their views on the topic. It is likely that the tone of news media on this topic at the time of surveying, resulted in a significant proportion of respondents visiting the survey to voice their opposition to fortnightly rubbish bin collection. This survey was not designed to be a mechanism for collecting information on concerns, but rather as an avenue for the community to share what Council could do to support them.

7.1 Consultant observations

Placed-based engagement

Across the seven pop-ups, people were generally happy to stop and have a conversation, even when they had concerns about the proposed change. While views on fortnightly rubbish collection were mixed, the overall feel of the engagement was constructive. People appreciated being able to speak to someone in person, ask questions and better understand what the change could mean for their household. In quite a few cases, you could see people become more open once they had the chance to talk it through.

One of the strongest themes was that people were often less worried about themselves and more worried about everyone else. Many participants said their own household could probably manage, but questioned how the change would work for larger families, households with nappies or medical waste, people in apartments, or residents who are already not sorting waste well. There was a strong undercurrent of concern about whether the wider community would do the right thing, and what that might mean for smell, overflowing bins and dumped rubbish.

We also observed that some of the concern was driven by confusion rather than outright opposition. Many people were still unclear about what can go in FOGO, and once that was explained, some became noticeably more comfortable with the idea of fortnightly rubbish collection. For others, hearing that there could be flexibility for households with additional needs helped reduce immediate concern. This suggests that good communication and practical support will be just as important as the change itself.

The pop-ups were particularly valuable because they gave people the chance to ask practical questions in a real and immediate way. Seeing the bins in person helped. So did being able to talk through their own living situation, rather than respond in the abstract. These conversations helped surface the real points of tension, but they also helped correct misinformation and gave people a chance to feel heard.

Overall, what we heard and observed was more nuanced than a simple yes or no to the proposal. People were thinking about fairness, practicality and whether the change would work across different household types and living situations. The engagement showed that while there is concern in the community, there is also a willingness to understand the change when information is clear, questions are answered properly and people can see that their circumstances have been considered.



Key observations from the focus groups

The focus groups targeted particular cohorts representing those who would likely be most affected:

- Large family households
- Households with young children in nappies
- People with medical needs that increase their household waste
- People who are concerned about how this change might affect them.

Across all four focus groups, a consistent underlying theme emerged that concerns about fortnightly rubbish collections were often less about participants' own ability to adapt, and more about a lack of confidence in how others in the community would respond.

Many participants indicated they could personally manage a fortnightly system, or would find ways to adjust, however they felt the change would amplify existing issues they were already witnessing in the community.

Participants frequently referred to current experiences of overflowing bins, contamination of recycling and FOGO bins, dumped rubbish, littering in public places, neighbours using other people's bins, and a broader sense that some people were already not following waste rules or community expectations.

As a result, fortnightly rubbish collections were often viewed not as a neutral operational change, but as something being introduced into a system already perceived to be under strain.

This concern about the behaviour of others was particularly pronounced in higher-density and shared living environments, where participants felt there was limited control or accountability over how bins were used.

Participants described situations where neighbours:

- contaminated shared bins
- overfilled communal waste areas
- relied on others to manage waste issues.

There was also a perception that some residents may not understand the system, may not prioritise waste sorting, or may face barriers that make compliance difficult, including language barriers, disability, ageing, mental health issues, or financial stress.

Recent industrial action and missed collections reinforced these concerns, with participants pointing to real-world examples of increased dumping, overflowing bins, and rubbish accumulating in public spaces when collections were disrupted.

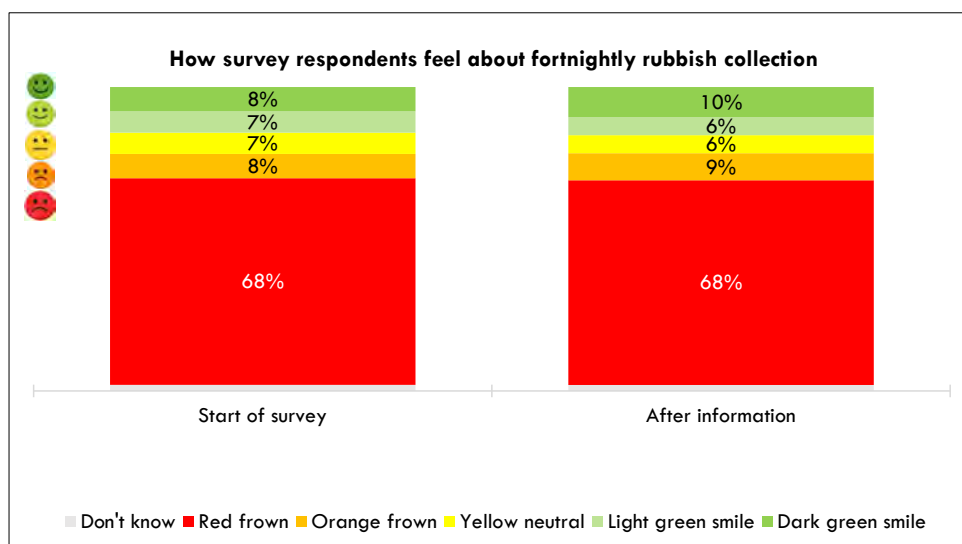
Collectively, these discussions reflected a broader concern that fortnightly rubbish collection could exacerbate real or perceived existing non-compliant or anti-social behaviours.



7.2 Overall sentiment

Source	Question	Sample
Survey	Please move the sliding marker under the faces to indicate how you feel about moving to fortnightly rubbish collections in 2027	n=1,154
Survey	Now that you have more information about the supports Council will provide, how do you feel about moving to fortnightly rubbish collections in 2027?	n=1,154
Pop-ups	How do you feel about moving to fortnightly rubbish collection in 2027?	n=172
Focus groups	Sentiment activity	n=29

Most survey respondents indicated they were strongly unhappy with the proposed move to fortnightly rubbish collection, and this remained relatively unchanged after providing information about the proposed supports provided by Council. However, it should be noted that given this was an online survey, the ability to influence opinions with content is limited.



When comparing the mean finding (where red frown is assigned 1, through to dark green smile assigned 5), there are notable variations by some respondent segments (start of survey):

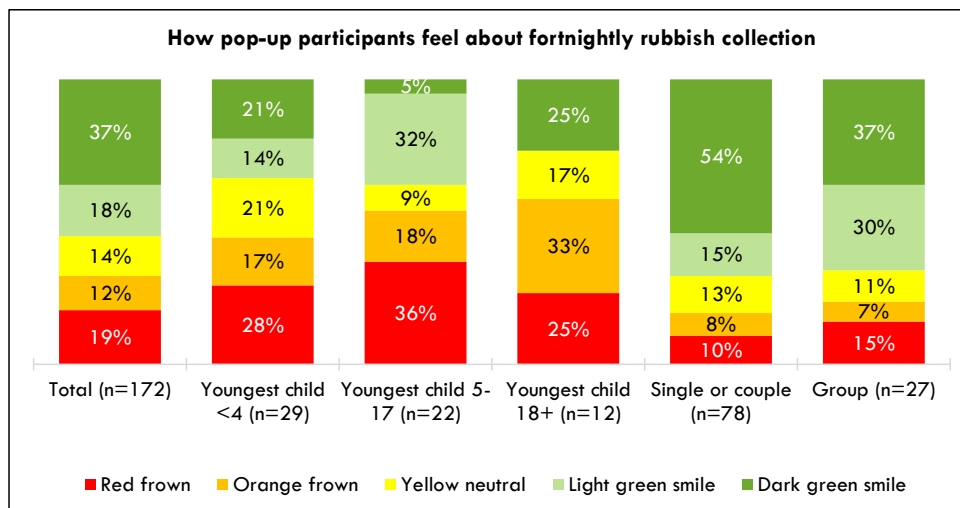
- Overall mean 1.73
- 65+ year olds 2.42 (↑)
- Southern suburbs 2.05 (↑)
- Households who have children with nappies 1.32 (↓)
- Larger households (5+ people) 1.2 (↓)
- Those who live in an apartment 2.46 (↑)
- Households with a single person or couple without children 2.51 (↑)

The difference in mean between survey respondents who had participated in the trial (1.9) and those who hadn't (1.73) was not statistically significant.



There were similar findings in the ‘after information’ means.

Participants at the pop-ups were generally more positive towards fortnightly rubbish collection, supporting the assessment that the online survey findings are skewed towards those with a negative opinion of changing to fortnightly rubbish collection.



When asked to explain their answer, 16 participants said that the change to fortnightly rubbish collection was fine, or that they were looking forward to it. Another 80 provided comments about their concerns, which have been analysed in the next section.

An analysis of the sentiment of the email, phone and letter submissions shows 55% registering opposition to the change to fortnightly rubbish collection, 21% with neutral sentiment (often requesting clarification of the scope / information on accessing the engagement activities) and 23% expressing positive sentiment.

In the focus groups, participants initially expressed mixed to negative sentiment toward the proposed move to fortnightly rubbish collections, with most positioning themselves as unhappy at the start of the session (69% of the 29 who participated in this exercise), however it should be noted that findings could be influenced by bandwagon effect (when people tend to align with the majority opinion). While some shift in perspective occurred by the end (56% unhappy, of 27), concerns remained, particularly about broader community impacts rather than individual household capacity, specifically for families with young children, and perceived potential issues such as incorrect bin use, contamination, and people not following the rules. It was perceived these would be amplified under a fortnightly system, particularly in shared housing or higher-density settings, where limited space, shared bins, and close proximity to neighbours amplify issues such as smell, hygiene, and bin misuse. Recent industrial action was referenced as a real-world example, with participants noting increased dumping, overflowing bins, and rubbish in public areas during this period.

Concerns raised through the engagement activities

The survey didn’t include a question asking people the challenges they might face from a move to fortnightly rubbish collection, however a significant proportion of respondents chose to share their views through other (unrelated) open ended questions within the survey as well as through email,



phone and letter contact with Council, pop-ups and focus groups. The lack of opportunity to use the survey to oppose the proposed move to fortnightly rubbish collection nor share potential issues was raised as a concern by 5% of survey respondents and 6% of email / phone / letters.

Whilst this engagement was not designed to collect feedback on concerns, it is important that the full scope of feedback that was provided by the community is analysed. It should be noted that the engagement activities collected feedback from those with an interest in the topic; as such it does not provide a representative sample of community sentiment.

Source	Question	Sample
Survey	Comments through open ended questions. Analysis counts each individual response once (e.g. if they mentioned the same topic across multiple questions it is only recorded once towards the overall %)	n=795
Email / phone / letter	Contact that was classified as raising a concern or issue.	n=332
Pop-ups	Tell us why you are feeling this way or any extra information you might need?	n=93
Focus groups	Sentiment summaries	n=35

Many specifically voiced that they did not wish to move to fortnightly rubbish collections:

- 468 comments in the survey (41%)
- 168 submissions by email, phone or letter (38%)
- 3 pop-up comments (3%)

However, through the email, phone and letter submissions there were 100 who expressed support for the change (24%), and 16 of pop-up comments (17%) said they were fine with the change to fortnightly rubbish collection.

The main concerns raised were as follows.

Theme	Summary
Smell / hygiene (377 commenters)	Mentioned by 19% of survey respondents, 34% of email / phone / letters, 15% pop-up comments. The main concerns related to odour and hygiene from nappies, cat litter, dog poo, sanitary waste and medical waste, particularly during warmer weather and in locations where bins are in close proximity to residences. 8% of email / phone / letters raised concerns about the impact of warmer weather on odour.
Won't work for certain households (240 commenters)	Specific households mentioned include those using nappies (175 comments: 7% survey, 19% email / phone / letters, 6% pop-ups) and pet waste (65 comments: 3% survey, 5% email / phone / letter, 6% pop-ups). Also people with a disability, who may have support workers who do cleaning periodically (generating large amounts of waste) and/or unable to manage moving larger bins.
Amenity / dumped rubbish (214 commenters)	Mentioned by 14% of survey respondents, 12% of email / phone / letters. This is perceived as already being a problem and likely to increase with fortnightly rubbish collection, as evidenced by increased incidence during the industrial action period. This extends to litter from overflowing bins, as well as intentional dumping of waste in public spaces or public bins.



Theme	Summary
Cost pressures (209 commenters)	Some expressed concern about paying more for a bigger bin (7% survey respondents, 2% pop-up comments), with some expecting a reduction in rates for the reduced service (6% survey respondents, 14% email / phone / letters). Within the comments a concern was raised that households who can't afford this may contribute to illegal dumping and reduced willingness or ability to manage waste appropriately.
Pests, vermin and insects (173 commenters)	Mentioned by 7% of survey respondents, 21% of email / phone / letters, 4% pop-up comments. Perceived risk of pests due to longer waste storage, particularly during warmer weather. Mentioned pests/vermin include mice, rats, snakes, ants, possums and maggots.
Behaviour of others / shared bin challenges (162 commenters)	Concerns about neighbours misusing bins, particularly in shared bin environments, was mentioned by 7% of survey respondents, 5% of email / phone / letters, and 18% of pop-up comments. There were a number of reports or perceptions that neighbours would dump rubbish in the bins of others, with potential risk of contamination and reduction in bin space. Contamination concerns were raised by 3% in the survey, and 3% of email / phone / letters. Particular challenges were raised by those with shared bins, with reports of neighbours not sorting rubbish into the correct bins. Some also raised concerns about who would manage bin cleaning and lack of suitable space.
Bins already full each week (159 commenters)	Mentioned by 9% of survey respondents, 12% of email / phone / letters, and 9% pop-up comments. Many reported that their bins were already full each week, and that there was no opportunity for them to reduce the amount of waste they produce.
Lack of space (125 commenters)	Mentioned by 6% of survey respondents, 12% of email / phone / letters, and 3 comments in the pop-ups. Smaller places and multi-dwelling residences raised concerns about not having space for a larger bin, nor space to store bins further from the house to manage smell. Furthermore some smaller households indicated they wouldn't have space to store waste that wouldn't fit in the bin. For smaller households one solution being sought was a request to keep the smaller bin size.
Impact of missed collections (50 commenters)	Mentioned by 3% of survey respondents and 3% of email / phone / letters. There was concern that if a collection was missed, with fortnightly collections waste could sit in a bin for up to a month. Some observed that parked cars can sometimes lead to missed bin collections.
Difficulty moving a bigger bin (42 commenters)	Mentioned by 1% of survey respondents, 5% of email / phone / letters, and 5% pop-up comments. Some were concerned that the larger bin size might be too heavy for some people (e.g. elderly or people with a disability) to move when full.



Items for clarification

Through the engagement activities many were seeking clarity on a range of topics.

- Whether they can keep their smaller bins (either due to weight, space or larger size not needed), with many requesting this not incur a fee. This was raised by 4% of survey respondents, 21% of email / phone / letters, and 4% pop-up comments. Often there was a request that this be coupled with a reduction in bin charges.
- Trial data / results for Merri-bek but also other Councils who have changed / decided not to change.
- How the change will impact on rates.
- Why bin sizes were selected.
- Frequency of bin collection across all bin types.
- Scope of what is being offered to those with unique situations who need more frequent bin collection (concessions).
- Under what circumstances households will incur additional charges.
- Bin sizes offered for no additional charge (concessions).
- How much space larger bins will take up and how households with limited space can accommodate additional bins.
- Budgets to show cost savings, and then passing these savings on to ratepayers.
- What goes into FOGO, as some still aren't sure, or are slow to transition.
- Planned review / auditing / consultation in the future.
- What to do when a bin is full (drop-off points).
- Cost of contamination.
- How data is calculated (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions).
- How will concessions be verified and audited.

Through the email / phone / letter enquiries:

- 9% were requesting information about the data used to inform Council decision-making, including trial findings and cost savings.
- 8% were requesting a concession for their particular situation.
- 6% were seeking clarification on the parameters of the proposed change.
- 1% were seeking to confirm that FOGO would continue to be weekly.

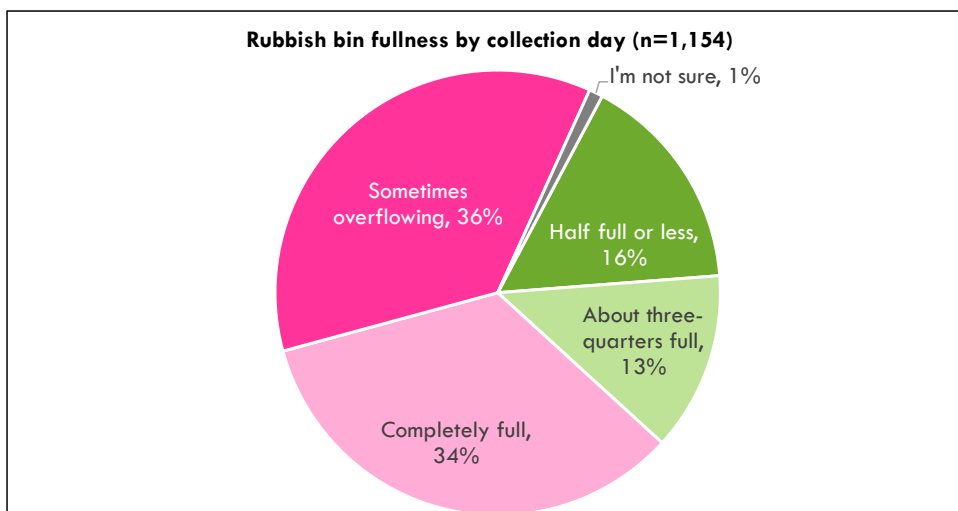


7.3 Current behaviours

Rubbish bin

Source	Question	Sample
Survey	By collection day, how full is your rubbish bin usually? (residents)	n=1,154
Focus groups	Anecdotal discussions about behaviours of self and neighbours	n=35

Seven in ten survey respondents self-reported that their rubbish bin was usually completely full or overflowing by collection day.



Some survey respondent segments more often indicated their bin is sometimes overflowing:

- Households with 5+ people (65%) (79% amongst those with 6+ people, compared to 9% of 1 person households)
- Group households (55%)
- Households with children in nappies (54%)
- 35-44 year olds (44%, compared to 17% 65+ year olds)
- Men (42%, compared to 33% women)

In the 2025 kerbside audit conducted by Council it was found that 89% of households presented their general rubbish bin for collection, and of these 75% were full. This equates to approximately 67% of households having full bins, which is similar to the distribution of survey respondents (70% with full bin).

In the focus groups, concern was often raised about those with young children with nappies being likely to quickly fill rubbish bins, and the resulting hygiene issues from nappies sitting in bins for longer periods. Pet waste was also commonly raised within focus groups as a potential hygiene issue.

In focus groups the most common types of waste mentioned as placed in general rubbish were nappies (11) and soft plastics / food packaging (4). Waste generation varies throughout the week,

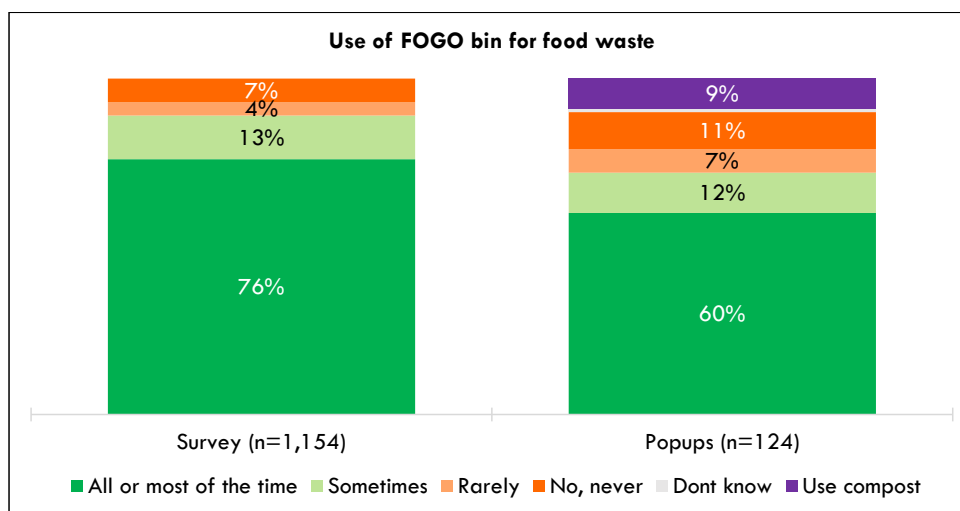


with higher volumes after grocery shopping, after visitors or events, and/or on weekends due to increased household activity. Some also mentioned their bin fills up because their neighbour uses it.

FOGO bin

Source	Question	Sample
Survey	Do you currently use your green Food and Garden Organics (FOGO) bin for food waste?	n=1,154
Pop-ups	Do you currently use your Green Food and Garden Organics (FOGO) bin for food waste? Voting pod	n=124
Survey	Why don't you use your FOGO bin for food waste?	n=127
Focus groups	What is the single biggest type of waste your household generates in a typical week? FOGO bin	n=8

The majority of survey respondents and pop-up participants said that they use their FOGO bin for food waste all or most of the time. In four of the pop-ups an additional option was added for those who said they compost their food waste (9% across whole pop-up sample, 16% amongst those who were given the option).

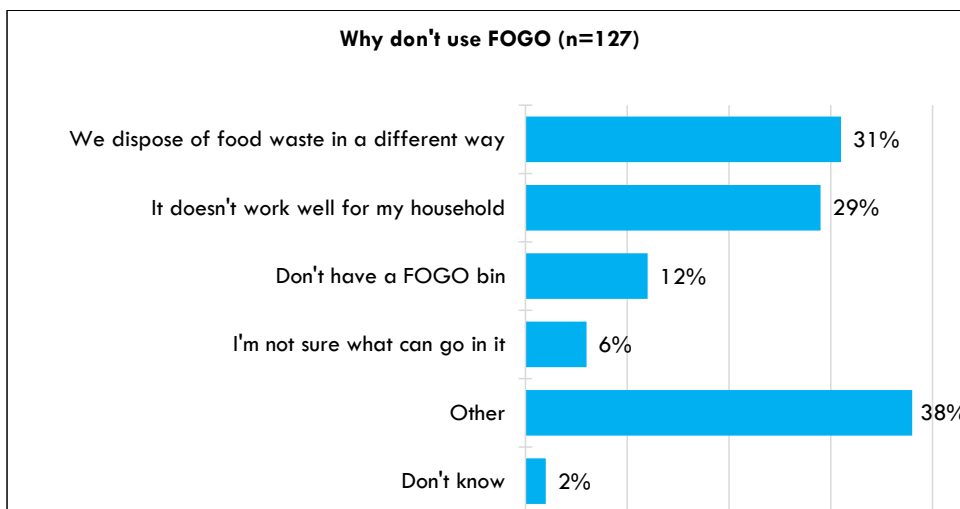


Of the 5 pop-up participants under the age of 18 who answered this question, 40% said all or most of the time, 40% said sometimes and 20% said rarely.

Survey respondents who said they didn't use the FOGO bin were asked why, with the most common reasons being that they dispose of food a different way, or that it just doesn't work for their household.

In focus groups the most common types of waste mentioned as placed in the green bin were food scraps (7 participants) and garden waste (5 participants).





Other reasons provided in the written comments include:

- Perception that it gets smelly or unhygienic (maggots, flies, pests).
- Already full from garden waste. This was also raised in focus groups.

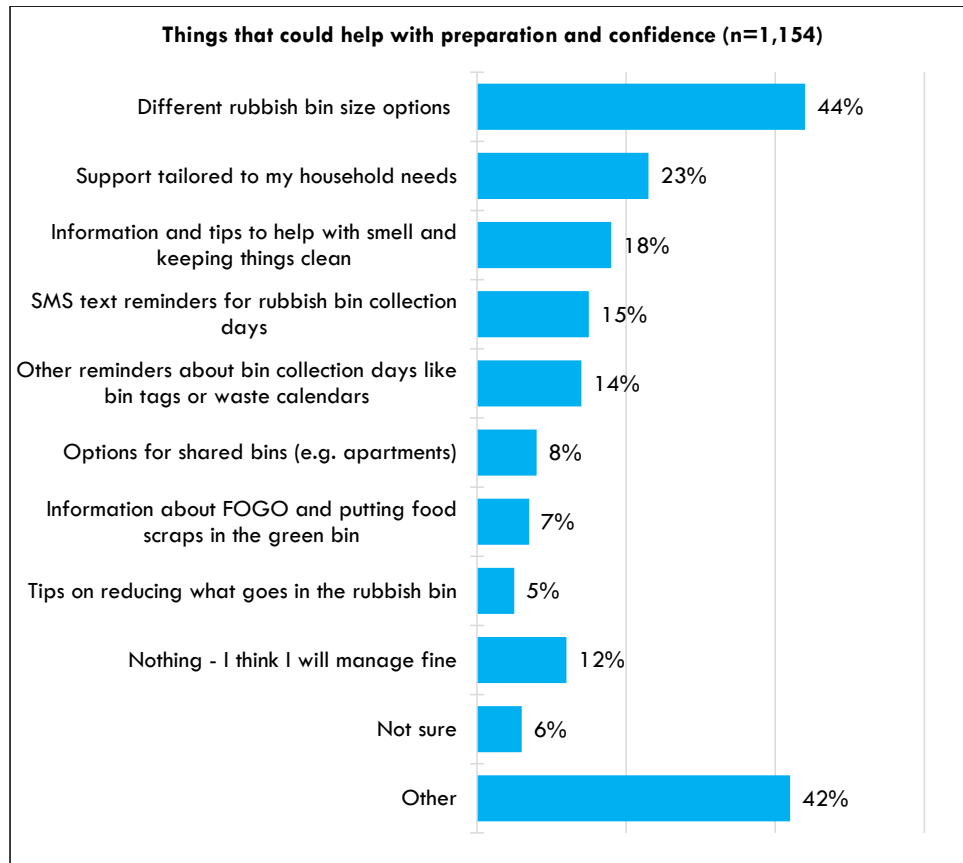
7.4 Help with preparation for fortnightly rubbish collection

Source	Question	Sample
Survey	Thinking about a move to fortnightly rubbish collection, what (if anything) would help you and your household feel confident and prepared?	n=1,154
Survey	Ideas that you could do at home?	n=185
Survey	Ideas that your street or neighbourhood could do?	n=64
Survey	Ideas of how Council could support you?	n=491
Focus groups	Sentiment summaries	n=35
Pop-ups	Ideas that you could do at home?	n=21
Pop-ups	Ideas that your street or neighbourhood could do?	n=6
Pop-ups	Ideas of how Council could support you?	n=56
Email / phone / letter	Contact that was classified as providing ideas for how Council can assist them in being prepared.	n=59



Supports

Amongst survey respondents, the most popular thing to help them to prepare for fortnightly rubbish bin collection was provision of different sized rubbish bins (44%).



Most of the other comments were referencing a desire for bins to be collected weekly. This has been analysed in the Concerns raised through the engagement activities section. Other comments relevant to the question asked were:

- Compostable bags for FOGO bin – to reduce smell and improve hygiene. Allow this, and perhaps offer them for free.
- Recycling of soft plastics.
- Bin cleaning service.
- Additional waste collections point.



Some potential supports were of greater appeal to certain segments of survey respondents:

Support	More often selected by:
Support tailored to my household needs (e.g. support for larger households, children in nappies, households with medical waste)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Households with 6+ people (54%) ▪ Households with children who use nappies (49%) ▪ 35-44 year olds (37%) ▪ Group households (36%) ▪ Women (27%) ▪ Those in the Central (27%) and Northern (25%) suburbs ▪ 14-34 year olds (26%)
Different rubbish bin size options (bigger or smaller rubbish bins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Those who live in group households (56%) ▪ 35-44 year olds (49%)
Other reminders about bin collection days like bin tags or waste calendars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Those who live in group households (23%)
Information about FOGO and putting food scraps in the green bin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Those who live in apartments (20%)
Information and tips to help with smell and keeping things clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Those who had participated in the trial (32%) ▪ Women (22%)
Options for shared bins (e.g. apartments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Those in apartments (43%) ▪ LGBTIQ+ (23%) ▪ Those who had participated in the trial (20%) ▪ Those in the Southern suburbs (13%) ▪ Single or couple with no children households (13%) ▪ People living with a disability (12%) ▪ CALD (10%)
Nothing – I think I will manage fine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 65+ year olds (27%) ▪ Single or couple with no children households (27%) ▪ 1 person households (27%) ▪ Those in the Southern suburbs (17%)

In the focus groups participants emphasised that education alone would not be sufficient to support behaviour change, highlighting the need for more targeted, culturally appropriate, and community-led approaches. Suggestions focused on a combination of education, incentives, infrastructure improvements, and stronger enforcement.

Ideas

There were four boxes within the survey which were commonly used by respondents to provide written feedback. 85% of respondents used one or more of these 4 text boxes to provide a written comment. In total, 50% of respondents included in their feedback a suggestion for supports to assist with fortnightly rubbish bin collection. 69% provided a written answer which was commenting on concerns they have about fortnightly rubbish collection, which have been analysed in the Concerns raised through the engagement activities section.



Often people wrote the same idea across multiple boxes within the survey, so these have been combined and analysed as the percentage (%) who mentioned that theme somewhere in the survey (counted by individual who mentioned the topic, rather than number of comments that mentioned that topic, as an individual may have mentioned it up to 4 times).

Emails and phone calls often asked for clarification of parameters of the change (e.g. can they keep their smaller landfill bin, will green bin still be collected weekly, will it cost to adjust bin sizes to suit new schedule). This suggests that clearer communications and education is needed.

At home

When asked to put forth ideas for home, relevant ideas were put forth by 185 survey respondents, 21 people in the pop-ups and 17 people in emails / phone calls / letters. The main themes were as follows. Counts show number of comments across all sources, with percentages calculated as a proportion of all respondents within each mode.

Theme	Summary	Quotes
Already do the right things (110 total comments - 9% survey respondents, 1% email / phone / letters, 0% pop-up comments)	There were many comments suggesting that there was nothing further they could do at home as they were already doing everything they can, including separating rubbish and composting	“While we already try to minimise waste where possible, there are some limitations with young children” [Man, 45-64, North] “My household uses each of the bins as intended. We already have a food scraps caddy that is either added to our worm farms or the food and garden bin.” [Woman, 45-64, North]
Reduce packaging (48 comments - 3% survey respondents, 2% email / phone / letters, 1% pop-up comments)	Some respondents mention that a key barrier to reducing their waste is the packaging their food comes in. Only a couple mention that they could buy food in bulk or from packaging-free sources. Some suggested Council could advocate for reduced packaging.	“Chose items in recyclable packages, or items that could be refilled (e.g. cleaning products or dried legumes).” [Woman, 45-64, Central] “Largely rubbish is from Food and online delivery so if Packages can be made easy to dispose, biodegradable or reusable would really help in minimizing the waste.” [Woman, 14-34, Central] “Try and find pre-packaged foods that will work in recycling/fogo.” [Central] “Much of our household waste is generated from unavoidable food packaging, which residents have limited ability to reduce.” [Woman, 14-34, South] “Council could also focus on reducing waste upstream by working with businesses to reduce packaging.” [Woman, 45-64, North] “Pressure the Vic government to pressure the supermarkets to take responsibility for excessive packaging.” [Man, South]



Theme	Summary	Quotes
Composting / worm farm (23 comments - 2% survey respondents, 0% email / phone / letters, 4% pop-up comments)	It was suggested that people could do more composting at home, or use community composting options.	<p>“Advertise local compost heaps with council funding and information.” [Woman, 14-34, North]</p> <p>“I’ve started directly burying food waste directly into the garden and putting a mesh to prevent rats from getting in. This makes for faster composting.” [No details]</p> <p>“Introduce composting bins with council benefits to users such as cost reduction on bins.” [Man, 65+, North]</p>
Better rubbish management (16 pop-up comments, 16%)	In the pop-ups, quite a few participants talked about how they could improve their rubbish management, through actions such as use of FOGO (including kitchen caddy), putting things in correct bins, compacting recycling, and taking soft plastics to drop-off points.	
Other (32 survey comments, 3%)	Other comments include information about alternative options for disposing of pet waste (e.g. public bins), burn off rubbish, and freeze smelly food scraps.	

In the neighbourhood

When asked to put forth ideas for in the neighbourhood, relevant ideas were put forth by 64 survey respondents, and 6 people in the pop-ups. The main themes were as follows. Counts show number of comments across all sources, with percentages calculated as a proportion of all respondents within each mode.

Theme	Summary	Quotes
Sharing bin space with neighbours (25 comments - 2% survey respondents, 5% pop-up comments)	There were quite a few comments suggesting that a system could be developed to facilitate neighbours sharing bin space when their bins aren’t full.	<p>“There could be a register people could offer bin space to others on that need the room if their bin is over flowing, however if that need presented it would indicate that the cycle frequency should be weekly not fortnightly.” [Woman, 35-44, North]</p> <p>“Somehow let neighbours know if you have space in your bins. Currently, at weekly schedules, we are overflowing and our neighbour tells us if she has space in hers before collection. It could reduce be a good community/neighbourhood initiative, but would need to be opt in for privacy reasons.” [Woman Central]</p> <p>“Households with fewer people usually have extra room in their bins. Perhaps they could leave their lids open or include a sign to indicate they’re ok with neighbours placing ‘overflow’ rubbish in their bins.” [South]</p>



Theme	Summary	Quotes
Additional communal or shared bins (13 comments, 1% survey respondents)	Shared community bins were put forth as a suggestion for management of overflow waste.	“Shared Large street bin for nappies, medical waste and such the street so we could have the one collection each week.” [Woman, 14-34, Central] “More shared bins/ drop off points in areas with very small properties in Brunswick.” [Woman, 45-64, South]
Public bins (12 comments - 1% survey respondents, 1% pop-up comments)	Including a call for more public bins, and bins being emptied more often.	“Council could put bins in our street in the park for dog waste and waste from the cafe in street.” [Woman, 45-64, South] “Place more bins in the park for pet rubbish.” [Woman, 45-64, North]
Neighbourhood garden / composting (5 comments, 0%)	A few suggested community-based composting options.	Neighbourhoods could introduce a safe food waste disposal facility, along with shared composting and better waste sorting. [Man, 65+, North] “Integrate Community Composting: Build underground composting hubs alongside the general waste bins specifically designed to feed organic material directly back into local community veggie patches and garden beds.” [35-44, South]
Other (23 comments, 2%)	Other suggestions include more diversion strategies, increase tree canopy to reduce heat on bins, and incentives for doing the right thing.	



Council support

When asked to put forth ideas for how Council can support them, relevant ideas were put forth by 491 survey respondents, 56 people in the pop-ups and 45 people in emails / phone calls / letters. Many of these topics were also raised in the focus groups. The main themes were as follows. Counts show number of comments across all sources, with percentages calculated as a proportion of all respondents within each mode.

Theme	Summary	Quotes
Bigger bins (194 comments - 13% survey respondents, 6% email / phone / letters, 14% pop-up comments)	<p>It was observed that the new bin being offered for fortnightly collection was smaller than double the current size. Some felt this would be challenging as their current bin size was already full each week, so they were requesting bigger bins at no extra charge.</p> <p>This was perceived to be a particular issue for larger households and those with young children, medical needs, and/or pets. Some were also requesting bigger green bins so they could fit green waste as well as food waste.</p>	<p>"If collections are reduced by half, the size of the bin should be doubled at no extra cost." [45-64, North]</p> <p>"Larger green bin as well as red bin to even the load." [Woman, 14-34, North]</p> <p>"The proposed concessions do not appreciate the fact that having a single child in nappies still creates an extraordinary amount of nappy waste. We divert all our FOGO waste to either our compost bin or our FOGO bin, we recycle religiously, and yet our red general rubbish bin is still overflowing every single week with nappy waste. We simply can't cope with a fortnightly collection with a single child in nappies. If you provided a 240L bin to us, we'd manage, but moving from 80L to 120L, when the frequency has doubled in length but not doubled in capacity, is simply not feasible for us. We cannot afford to upgrade our bin to a 240L on our own." [Woman, 14-34, North]</p> <p>"Provide a larger green bin as well as a soft plastics recycling facility." [Woman, North]</p>
Rate reduction (131 comments - 6% survey respondents, 14% email / phone / letters, 1% pop-up comments)	<p>Call for a reduction in rates due to a reduced service.</p>	<p>"Smaller waste volume and less frequent pickups should see a dramatic reduction in our rates notice." [Woman, 35-44, North]</p> <p>"If council does reduce the frequency of bin collection, rates should be significantly reduced and multiple bins (or bins larger than 120l) should be made available at no cost." [South]</p>



Theme	Summary	Quotes
<p>Free waste collection points (92 comments - 6% survey respondents, 1% pop-up comments)</p>	<p>Comments were calling for more free alternative disposal options such as more frequent hard waste collection, local drop-off points (e.g. tip or transfer station), and communal bins. There were a range of scenarios stated where this would be useful, including additional waste from visitors or celebrations, pet waste, and nappies.</p>	<p>“More council bins on every corner because this is where people will be dumping their rubbish. Bring back proper hard rubbish collections.” [Woman, North]</p> <p>“Have council bins on the street so that households with dogs and cats who are already struggling with red bin capacity can empty their litter into.” [Woman, 35-44, North]</p> <p>“If the council is going to collect red bins less frequently, they should offer alternative waste services that people can use on a case by case basis like some councils do - something less than hard refuse but more flexible than a small red bin that's only collected once a fortnight, such as a local waste station where people can bring their rubbish if it doesn't fit in their red bin.” [South]</p> <p>“A central drop off point for glass would help, so that we could get rid of the glass bin... we don't have space for it and we barely use it.” [Woman, 45-64, North]</p>
<p>Education (89 comments - 6% survey respondents, 1% email / phone / letters, 17% pop-up comments)</p>	<p>Suggested topic areas for education were: how to reduce waste, how to recycle soft plastics, and how to correctly use bins.</p> <p>In the focus groups it was raised that further education is needed on how to use FOGO bins correctly, reducing nappy and packaging waste, and reducing smell (e.g. double bagging). This needs to occur in languages other than English.</p> <p>It was also suggested that Council use a behaviour change expert to develop strategies.</p> <p>May include in-person workshops (e.g. using re-usable nappies), stickers on bins, community champions, and incentives for doing the right thing.</p>	<p>“Run webinars/in-person events to teach us how to reduce waste from the rubbish bin.” [Woman, 35-44, North]</p> <p>“Merri-beck needs to consult with Surfcoast council and adopt their app which - advises which item of rubbish goes where, and - advises which bins to put out, when” [Woman]</p>



Theme	Summary	Quotes
FOGO bags (67 comments - 5% survey respondents, 2% email / phone / letters, 2% pop-up comments)	Allow compostable / paper / biodegradable bags in FOGO bins. It is perceived that this could address concerns about odour and cleanliness of bins. Some mentioned that other Councils allow this.	<p>“Permit The use of biodegradable bags in the Green bin.” [45-64, North]</p> <p>“Complimentary bags which can be placed in caddies for food scraps (our issue is the caddy became mouldy very quickly.” [Central]</p> <p>“Collect green waste weekly and support compostable bags in green bins to reduce smell and risk of insects.” [Woman, 45-64, North]</p>
Smaller bins (139 comments - 4% survey respondents, 21% email / phone / letters, 4% pop-up comments)	Some smaller households don't want a larger bin, due to lack of space or it being unnecessary. Some suggest there should be a reduction in fees for those who keep the smaller bin size.	<p>“Let us keep our current, small rubbish bin (red lid). It takes us weeks to fill it so we don't need, or want, a larger bin.” [65+, South]</p> <p>“Provide smaller bin options as we have limited space to store bins.” [Woman, 14-34, South]</p>
Get rid of purple glass bin (41 comments, 4% survey respondents)	Some said they don't need the purple glass bin. Request for not having a glass bin was both from a cost perspective (reduce waste management costs so red bins can be collected weekly) as well as space related (more room for a larger red bin).	<p>“Change it back to how it used to be with glass being recycled in the large yellow lid bins and cancel the purple bin collections to save money for ratepayers and keep the current weekly collection of refuse.” [North]</p> <p>“Our block of 3 townhouses does not require 3 separate glass (purple) bins. They are rarely out of as we do not use many glass items. We would prefer a shared bin and reduced cost.” [Man, 35-44, North]</p> <p>“Maintain weekly general rubbish bin pickups, reduce glass bin collections instead.” [Man, South]</p>



Theme	Summary	Quotes
<p>Advocate for recycling of soft plastics (48 comments - 3% survey respondents, 2% email / phone / letters, 4% pop-up comments)</p>	<p>6 comments said they could improve this themselves (e.g. separating out soft plastics), however 42 suggested this would require provision of soft plastic recycling services by Council or a third party provider.</p>	<p>“Recycle soft plastics if the council would actually be proactive and provide convenient (or any) locations for drop off, or even better you could have it picked up with the rubbish.” [Woman, 45-64, North]</p> <p>“Soft plastics are also hard to manage in the bin. I have been trying to work out how to compress them down to put out. I wish I could send them to recycling.” [Woman, 45-64, Central]</p> <p>“The biggest reduction to our waste was when REDcycle was operating. Getting plastics out of the rubbish bin will reduce the volume of rubbish across all households. While the council is not responsible for plastic recycling, it does seem that it needs to be a coordinated approach.” [Woman, 45-64]</p> <p>“Council to set up their own soft plastics recycling collection program as RedCycle no longer operating and other soft plastics recycling options are harder to find and access. Providing a pick up or collection point for recycling soft plastics (e.g at local libraries) would help lessen the red bin waste for families who are trying to do the right thing.” [Woman, 35-44, North]</p>
<p>Alter concession scope (43 comments, 1% survey respondents, 8% email / phone / letters)</p>	<p>Some suggested that Council could consider expanding concessions to include vulnerable households, those with one child in nappies (focus group comment), larger households, and those with pets. Perhaps even allow 2 x 240lt bins for some households. Many of the emails were requesting concessions that were already in the planned list.</p>	<p>“Expand the list of concessions. It is underestimated how many nappies and wipes that a household with only one child can generate. Pets also generate waste and this is not accounted for in any of the concessions.” [Woman, 14-34, North]</p>
<p>More transparent information and data (42 comments, 0% survey respondents, 9% email / phone / letters)</p>	<p>Requests for data include the data used to confirm that the proposed bin sizes and fortnightly collection would be manageable for most households; trial findings, and impact on costs / rates.</p>	<p>“Council could provide tangible data, rather than fluff. For example, Merri-Bek is saying this change will “Keep costs down for ratepayers” - which costs will be reduced? Is it rates? How much will rates be reduced by?” [14-34, North]</p> <p>“Be transparent with the results from the trial. So many residents did not like this change. We need to see data where this was actually supported.” [Woman, 35-44, Central]</p>



Theme	Summary	Quotes
Increase recycling collection frequency (36 comments - 3% survey respondents, 3% pop-up comments)	There was a suggestion that recycling be collected weekly.	“Weekly collection of mixed recycling bins. They are always the most full bin in our townhouse complex.” [Woman, 45-64, Central] “The council could support us by providing recycling bin collection weekly instead of us having to store a huge amount of recyclable waste in our house every second week.” [Woman, 35-44, South]
FOGO bin cleaning service (26 comments - 2% survey respondents, 1% email / phone / letters, 2% pop-up comments)	Some suggested that council provide a FOGO bin cleaning service, or provide products for residents to clean bins or reduce smell.	“Free bin cleaning/sanitisation at regular intervals.” [North] “Provide a service to clean green waste bins. Provide something to remove food waste stuck to bin. Provide something to mask odour.” [Woman, North]
Reminders (16 comments - 1% survey respondents, 0% email / phone / letters, 1% pop-up comments)	Some suggested that reminders would be helpful, with a range of formats suggested including an app, a waste calendar or SMS reminders.	“Calendar and information on what can be recycled.” [South] “Provide an APP similar to Surf Coast Council app called SCRRApp that tells you when bins are collected and will remind you if you want. It also gives you an A-Z Guide which enables you to search where all possible waste materials should go, and provides LINKS to 12 months pdf Calendar, Disposal sites and other useful contact information regarding dealing with waste material.” [Man, 65+]
Kitchen caddy for FOGO (13 comments - 1% survey respondents, 1% email / phone / letters)	There was a suggestion that kitchen caddies be provided to all households. A number of comments mentioned that the availability of these should be promoted to renters, as sometimes the FOGO caddy isn't left with the property at the end of tenancy.	“Larger garbage bins and complementary kitchen caddies would be useful.” [Woman, 65+, Central] “The free kitchen caddies will be super helpful - I suspect these disappear with each new tenancy. But they'll only help if renters know they can get them. You probably need some way of updating every household at least once every year about waste collection policies, including the availability of the kitchen caddies, because of how insane the renter turnover is in this area.” [Woman, 14-34, South]
Seasonal adjustments to frequency (12 comments, 0% survey respondents, 7% pop-up comments)	Some suggested that there could be seasonal adjustments to frequency of collection to cater for warmer weather and/or celebration periods.	“Implement a seasonal program where bins are picked up weekly in summer and less often in winter. Any bin that's been in 43 degree sun with garbage shouldn't be left to sit for 2 weeks.” [Woman, 35-44, North] “Additional support at Christmas when households produce a higher volume of waste.” [Woman, 45-64, Central]



Theme	Summary	Quotes
Allow bins to be kept on the street (10 comments, 1% survey respondents, 0% email / phone / letters)	This was put forth as a solution for those who live on properties without enough space for larger bins, or for whom bin storage is too close to the house (concerns about smell).	"...build some kind of weatherproof and smell proof kiosks where each town house can use to keep the bins in so they don't parade out on the kerb outside our doors all week smelling, being an eyesore and being a hazard to our health and well-being" [14-34, South] "Provide bins away from housing for extremely bad odour rubbish (such as soiled nappies or menstrual products), which already stink after only one week. Being in a townhouse? The only place to have our bins is outside our front door so it will be unbearably stinky after 2 weeks." [Woman, 35-44, South]
Increase rates to cover weekly collection (4 comments, 0% survey respondents)	Some of those who want to keep weekly collections indicated they are willing to pay more to keep the weekly service.	"Make this optional - I would be happy to pay a surcharge for weekly collections, using my existing bin." [Woman, 45-64, South]
Parking restrictions on bin pick-up days (4 comments, 0% survey respondents)	Some households reported that their bins were missed due to people parking in the way. It was observed that missed pick-ups could lead to challenges with having waste sitting in the bin for a month (becomes full, hygiene, smell). Suggestions include changes to parking restrictions to prevent cars parked in the way on bin days.	"Review parking restrictions on pick up days/times." [Woman, 65+, North]
Other (12 comments, 1%)	Subsidies for in-home solutions (e.g. food waste systems) and re-usable nappies. Ability to lock bins to prevent misuse by neighbours. Increase penalties for those doing the wrong thing. Ensure renters can get a larger bin if needed.	

Through the emails / phone calls and letter it was clear that the community requires additional clarity on aspects of the proposed change, specifically:

- Impact on rates and cost for different bin sizes (27%).
- Desire to keep their small bins (24%).
- Clarity on FOGO frequency (3%).
- Options for special needs households (3%).



7.6 Businesses

In the survey there were 18 respondents who indicated they owned or operated a business located at a location separate to their home, who use the Council kerbside bin service. Most indicated their business was in Brunswick (44%), Coburg (17%) or Pascoe Vale (11%). 28% said their business was an office / professional services, 17% categorised their business as health or medical, 11% as hospitality and 11% as trades.

Of these:

- 72% selected the dark red frown face when asked how they felt about moving to fortnightly rubbish collection, and 11% selected the dark green smile face. The mean out of 5 was 1.78.
- 44% said their bin was usually completely full and 33% said sometimes overflowing.
- 67% said moving to fortnightly rubbish collection would likely have a significant impact on their business (would be difficult). Only 6% perceived there would be no impact, with 11% indicating it would be manageable and 11% saying some adjustments would be needed.
- The main things that were identified as likely to help their business feel confident and prepared were different bin sizes (39%), options for shared bins (17%), SMS reminders (17%) and support tailored to their business needs (11%). 22% wrote in a comment that they want collections to stay weekly, and 2 comments that the smell would be an issue for their business.
- 33% said they would definitely and 6% said they would probably continue to use Council's service when collections move to fortnightly. Half (50%) were unsure and 11% said probably not.

Eight emails were received by Council from businesses who were concerned that fortnightly rubbish collection wouldn't be suitable for their needs, for similar reasons raised by households (odour, space, not enough capacity, amenity and risk of neighbour misuse).



7. Next steps

- Community engagement findings will be shared with the community, including making this report publicly available via the Conversations Merri-bek website.
- Community engagement findings will be presented to Council at an upcoming Council meeting for consideration.
- Outcomes of the fortnightly rubbish trial and financial and environmental implications, alongside this community feedback, will help inform Council's decision on the future of fortnightly rubbish collections in Merri-bek.



8. Appendices

9.1 Survey

Q1. How do you feel about moving to fortnightly rubbish collections in 2027? Please indicate how you feel by sliding the marker to one of the faces. The question mark indicates "I don't know".



Q2. What is your connection to Merri-bek? Choose all that apply

- Resident
- Operate a business
- None of these

Q3. [IF BUSINESS] does your business operate from home or a separate location?

- Home-based business
- Separate location (office building, warehouse, shop etc)
- Both (do some work at a separate location and some from home)

Q4. Does your household have any of the following that may affect waste needs? Choose all that apply

- Children in nappies
- A person with a medical condition that produces additional waste
- Larger household (5 or more people)
- Home-based business/work from home
- None of the above
- Something else (please specify)

Q5. By collection day, how full is your rubbish bin?

- Half full or less
- About three-quarters full
- Completely full
- Sometimes overflowing
- I'm not sure

Q6. Do you currently use your Green Food and Garden Organics (FOGO) bin for food waste?

- Yes, all or most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- No, never
- Don't know

Q7. [IF Q6=NEVER] Why don't you use your Green Food and Garden Organics (FOGO) bin for food waste? Choose all that apply



- I'm not sure what can go in it
- It doesn't work wekk for my household
- We dispose of food waste a different way - composting/worm farm etc
- Don't have a Green Food or Garden Organics (FOGO) bin
- Don't know
- Something else (please specify)

Q8. Thinking about a move to fortnightly rubbish collection, what (if anything) would help you and your household feel confident and prepared? Choose all that apply

- Nothing - I think I manage fine
- Tips on reducing what goes in the rubbish bin
- Information about FOGO and putting food scraps in the green bin
- SMS text reminders for rubbish bin collection days
- Other reminders about bin collection days like bin tags or waste calendars
- Different rubbish bin size options (bigger or smaller rubbish bins)
- Support tailed to my household needs (e.g., support for larger household, children in nappies, households with medical waste)
- Options for shared bins (e.g., apartments)
- Information and tips to help with smell and keeping things clean
- Not sure
- Other

Q9. As part of the trial in 2025, Council tested a range of supports to help people with fortnightly rubbish collections. Some of these supports are listed below.

- Increased the size of the standard rubbish bin from 80 litres to 120 litres
- Eligible (concession) households can get a rubbish bin larger than 120 litres for no extra cost
- Non-eligible households can pay to get a rubbish bin larger than 120 litres
- Households can choose a smaller 80 litre rubbish bin and pay a reduced waste charge
- Complimentary kitchen caddies for food scraps
- Discounts on reuseable cloth nappy and period/incontinent products subsidy
- Information like calendars, magnets, guides with advice and tips
- Text message reminders for when to put your rubbish bin out
- Waste review for people living in apartments/units/townhouses

Do you have any other ideas that would help support you and your household's change to fortnightly rubbish collections?

Ideas that you could do at home?	
Ideas that your street or neighbourhood could do?	



Ideas of how Council could support you?	
---	--

Q10. Now that you have more information about the supports Council has trialled, how do you feel about moving to fortnightly rubbish collections in 2027?



A little bit about you and your household

Q11. What type of home do you have?

- Separate house
- Townhouse/unit/villa
- Apartment
- I'd prefer not to say
- Other

Q12. What is your household type?

- Household with youngest child under 4
- Household with youngest child aged 5-17
- Household with youngest child aged 18+
- Single or couple with no children
- Group household (e.g. share house)
- I'd prefer not to say
- Other

Q13. How many people live in your household?

- 1 person
- 2-3 people
- 4-5 people
- 6 or more people
- I'd prefer not to say

Q14. Did you participate in Council's fortnightly rubbish trial took place in 2025?

- Yes
- No

Business owner questions

Q15. Does your business currently use Council's waste collection service? That is, kerbside bins with the red or dark green lid.



- Yes
- No

Q16. Which suburb is your business located?

- Brunswick
- Brunswick East
- Brunswick West
- Coburg
- Coburg North
- Fawkner
- Fitzroy North
- Glenroy
- Gowanbrae
- Hadfield
- Oak Park
- Parkville
- Pascoe Vale
- Pascoe South
- Tullamarine
- Other

Q17. What type of business do you operate?

- Hospitality (cafe, restaurant, takeaway)
- Retail
- Office/professional services
- Health/medical
- Trades/light industrial
- Other

Q18. How full is your rubbish bin(s) by collection day?

- Half full or less
- About three-quarters full
- Completely full
- Often overflowing
- Not sure

Q19. What impact do you think moving to fortnightly rubbish collections would have on your business?

- No impact
- Minor impact - manageable
- Moderate impact - some adjustments needed
- Significant impact - would be difficult
- Not sure

Q20. What concerns, if any, would your business have about fortnightly rubbish collections?

- Insufficient bin capacity
- Odour/hygiene issues



- Lack of space for additional bins
- Increased costs
- Impacts on staff time
- Customer perception
- No concerns
- Don't know
- Other

Q21. What support would help your business manage the change?

- Larger rubbish bin (larger than 360L)
- Additional bins (fee-for-service option)
- Waste reduction advice
- Recycling support
- Food waste support
- Clear communication and transition information
- Nothing - we would manage
- Don't know
- Other

Q22. When rubbish collections move to fortnightly, will you continue to use Council's waste service?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Unsure
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Q23. Please tell us why you gave this answer



9.2 Media coverage

Fortnightly rubbish collection across city 'inevitable' as waste costs mount

Sunday Age · Rachael Ward · Newspaper · 08 Mar 2026, 12:00 am

... it. Hobsons Bay in the city's west was the first to switch collection to every second week but shifted back to weekly in 2021 after a backlash from residents. Merri-bek in the city's north is now planning to start fortnightly general rubbish collection from the middle of next year, which ...

[Link to article](#)

Brunswick Voice · Social Network · 30 Mar 2026, 10:43 am

Merri-bek Council is proposing moving household rubbish collection from weekly to fortnightly next year. Learn how these changes will affect your bins. <https://t.co/xOSKS3Kngj>

[Link to post](#)

Fortnightly rubbish collection 'inevitable' as waste costs mount

The Age · Rachael Ward · Internet · 08 Mar 2026, 5:03 am

... s the first to switch collection to every second week but shifted back to weekly in 2021 after a backlash from residents. Merri-bek in the city's north is now planning to start fortnightly general rubbish collection across the municipality from the middle ...

[Link to article](#)

Melbourne community divided over council plan to slash weekly rubbish collection to every other week

9News · Maddison Leach · Internet · 16 Apr 2026, 8:39 am

A Melbourne community is being torn apart by the local council's divisive plan to slash red bin collection services from weekly to fortnightly next year. Merri-bek City Council, about 5km from Melbourne CBD, has been rolling out changes to its kerbside b ...

[Link to new item](#)

The transcript covers two main topics: local council challenges and the wine industry. First, a listener shares a workaround for f...

3AW · Jacqui Felgate · AM Radio · 24 Mar 2026, 5:24 pm

Interview Another text message from Bruno, AFL pays no tax and charges like a wounded bull. And we're going to take a look at this as well on Merri-bek Council So they've gone from weekly bin collection to fortnightly bin collection. And they say, oh, that's to save you money. But it's not really.



It's because the state government is putting councils on the hook for so many other fees. They don't have enough money to go around to stuff that you actually care ...

[Link to media portal](#)

The transcript discusses several contentious issues, including local council decisions to reduce rubbish collection frequency from...

3AW · Tom Elliott · AM Radio · 09 Mar 2026, 10:24 am

Interview ... June. But I think you and I and everybody else knows that the decision has been made. And they're putting off the evil day to tell everybody because they probably want to wait until lot of other councils decide to do it too, and then it won't seem so bad. Thanks, Nancy. But again, look, Marybeck is one of those very activist councils. There's positions on all sorts of things, nuclear weapons you know, Palestine and you ...

[Link to media portal](#)

Dr. Trevor Thornton from Deakin University discusses the shift by many councils to fortnightly rubbish collection, arguing it redu...

3AW · Tom Elliott · AM Radio · 09 Mar 2026, 9:13 am

Interview ... University. He's a lecturer in hazardous materials management. Dr Trevor Thornton, good morning. Tom. How are you? Well, good. So something like a quarter to maybe 30% of councils already only collect rubbish fortnightly and quite a few more are thinking about doing the same. Is this a good or a bad thing? I think overall it's a good thing. ...

[Link to media portal](#)

The transcript highlights the tragic loss of Aidan, a beloved security guard at Alfred Hospital and a respected club member known ...

ABC Radio Melbourne · Bob Murphy & Richelle Hunt · AM Radio · 09 Mar 2026, 7:22 am

Interview ... out? There's nothing like a mad dash in the morning in your Jimmy Jams, getting out out there because you've heard a bin be picked up and you realise that yours isn't out there. But one in three councils are now reducing when they pick up your rubbish bin. So this is your landfill bin. So some are pushing back on this. So Mary Beck is the latest council to try and scale back their bin collections. ...

[Link to media portal](#)

The transcript features discussions from a radio show, including updates on Formula 1 events at Albert Park, where Mercedes driver...

3AW · Darren James · AM Radio · 08 Mar 2026, 11:38 am

Interview ... it. We had a 120-litre rubbish bin that got emptied every fortnight, which is totally inadequate for a family of six, which we are. We ended up having to pay for an extra bin and just recently I rang the council again to check on whether we have to take the green bin again because we recycle and we do everything. We take all the to the recycle and get the 10 cents for the bottles. ...

[Link to media portal](#)



Victorian councils are transitioning to a standardized four-bin system by July 2027, shifting general landfill rubbish collections...

3AW · Darren James · AM Radio · 08 Mar 2026, 11:11 am

Interview Now, moving on to rubbish, by July 2027, the weekly red bin collection will be a thing of the past. Now, Victorian councils will be shifting to a standardised four-bin system, which means weekly food and organic service, while the general landfill rubbish will be restricted down to once a fortnight. Now, do you think this is a good idea? I think rubbish builds up quicker than that, and in my mind, I think once a week is a thing that we should have. ...

[Link to media portal](#)





Fortnightly rubbish trial – evaluation report

prepared for

Merri-bek City Council

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Document details

Date	Version	Details	Authors
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23/01/2026	Draft v08	Draft provided to MCC	Patrick Gilmour & Joe Lea
2/02/2026	Final v01	Final draft incorporating MCC feedback	Patrick Gilmour & Joe Lea

Executive Summary

The fortnightly rubbish trial

Merri-bek City Council (MCC) is trialling a fortnightly collection of rubbish bins to inform a municipal-wide transition away from weekly rubbish collection. Fortnightly collection is expected to deliver a range of benefits for council and the community, including reductions in collection/disposal costs and increased diversion of organic material out of landfill.

The fortnightly rubbish trial (the Trial) started in July 2025 across approximately 3000 households, apartments, units, businesses and other organisations in parts of Hadfield and Brunswick/Brunswick West.

This report outlines an evaluation of the Trial six months after it started. It considers whether the Trial has delivered its intended benefits and what lessons there are for the future. Key sources of data include:

- **Waste audits of 180 households in the Trial area**, before the Trial and after six months of fortnightly rubbish collections.
- **Reporting from 1991 bin inspections** that were used over the course of the Trial to explore any issues of contamination, overfilling and public bin use.
- **Total weights from rubbish collection trucks** used in the Trial areas.
- **Feedback from nine pop-up engagement activities in Trial areas**, including a simple survey of people's sentiment about the Trial (n=93).
- **Online surveys of Trial participants** before (n=133) and during the Trial (n=352). Participants were invited as part of the information mailed to each property for the Trial. The surveys provide insights on people's experience with the Trial and fortnightly rubbish collection but, because it is subject to self-selection bias, it should not be used as a representative sample of Trial participants.
- **Interviews of trial participants (n=11) and staff (n=8)** to explore any additional insights on the Trial implementation.
- **Records about Trial implementation** including bin allocations, financial modelling, customer service interactions and observations recorded by the street cleansing team.

Key findings

The fortnightly rubbish trial has been a significant investment by MCC into better understanding the feasibility of fortnightly rubbish collections in Merri-bek. While there are varied views in the Trial community on fortnightly rubbish collection, overall, the Trial has successfully demonstrated that fortnightly rubbish collection is achieving its key goals:

- **There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of food waste being disposed of in FOGO bins and a corresponding decrease in what is being disposed of in the rubbish bin.** Between June 2025 and December 2025 the proportion of food waste being disposed of in FOGO bins has almost doubled – going up from 29% to 56%. In Hadfield, the improvement has been even more pronounced, with 2.5 times more food waste ending up in FOGO bins (an increase from 22% to 56%).
- **Because of this change in disposal the weight of rubbish bins being collected each fortnight has dropped.** Data directly from waste collection services show a decrease of 19% in the average weight of rubbish bins collected per fortnight – from 14.1 kg per fortnight per property serviced (pre-Trial) to 11.4 kg per fortnight in December 2025.
- In aggregate, **the overall diversion rate in the Trial area has increased from a baseline of 59% pre-Trial to 65%.** This far exceeds the average diversion rate of 48% for councils in the Port Phillip region.



- While FOGO contamination has been a concern in other councils, **the overall FOGO contamination rate did not change, staying stable at 1%**. While there were increases in recycling contamination in Brunswick / Brunswick West, these have been offset by decreases in Hadfield. They appear to be driven largely by people trying to recycle types of paper, metal and plastic that are not recyclable (e.g. coffee cups).
- **The changes above are being driven by residents paying more attention to their waste and how they are disposing of it.** Around two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents reported they had changed key waste-related behaviours. This includes using their FOGO bins more, more carefully sorting recyclables and changing purchasing decisions to reduce the waste coming into their homes.
- **The potential cost savings from the changes, if they were to be rolled-out council-wide, are estimated to be in the order of \$1.3 million to \$2.1 million per year**, with potential for even more cost savings with higher diversion of food waste from the rubbish bin.

Data on public bin use and dumping does not show any change attributable to the Trial – despite public concern that this could be a consequence of less frequent rubbish collections. That said, longitudinal data across Merri-bek does indicate that public dumping is a growing issue to address regardless of the collection frequency of the rubbish service – consistent with trends across the metropolitan region.

Importantly, **the Trial has also demonstrated that once people adjust to fortnightly collection, their views become more positive and they find it easier.** After just six months of the Trial, 37% of survey respondents found the fortnightly collection to be ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ – up 7% from the pre-trial survey. This trend is expected to continue as people get more used to the fortnightly collections and changes to behaviour become more of a habit.

In terms of overall sentiment, there was a split between suburbs - 65% of respondents from Brunswick / Brunswick West being positive or neutral about the prospect of fortnightly collections as compared to 35% for Hadfield respondents. The main issues that people reported having with the transition to fortnightly rubbish collection were:

- **A lack of capacity in bins.** This was specifically mentioned by 10% of survey respondents and is supported by evidence from the bin audits and inspections. These data sources showed over half (57%) of rubbish bins were being presented full and around 2-10% being regularly ‘overfull’
- **Concerns over smell and cleanliness.** This was specifically mentioned by 15% of survey respondents. It relates to both concerns about putting food waste in the FOGO bins without being in some sort of bag, as well as concerns over having items such as nappies and pet waste in rubbish bins for two weeks.

The two key factors that appeared to drive how easily survey respondents adapted to the fortnightly collection were:

- Household size – **respondents from larger households found the fortnightly collection more difficult.** Those with children in nappies had further difficulties but the additional impact was much less than household size alone.
- Suburb – **respondents from Hadfield were more likely to report that fortnightly rubbish collection is difficult** as compared to respondents from southern suburbs. This appears to be independent of household size, housing type or whether families have children in nappies. Importantly it also does not appear to have impacted their actual performance in terms of adaption - Hadfield improved food waste diversion and contamination levels more substantially than occurred in Brunswick / Brunswick West.

When considering the potential for broader roll-out, **several council support mechanisms appeared to be important.** This included:

- Calendars and SMS reminders to help residents put the correct bin out.



- Providing flexibility in bin size selection
- Providing a range of concessions that, in turn, helped people to access larger bins at no additional cost.

There were some gaps in people's awareness of the bin options and concessions. This is a potential area of opportunity to enhance the already good level of council support, particularly for any future roll-out.

Scheduling additional services during periods such as Christmas may further help people during peak periods of waste generation.

Concerns about smell and cleanliness are more difficult to address. However, **there were gaps in people's understanding of their options and approaches with FOGO, meaning that there may be opportunities here too** – for example in greater promotion of paper bags and kitchen caddies and education on how to use the FOGO bin more effectively. This may also help in further increasing the diversion rate for food organics.

Ultimately, the Trial has shown that fortnightly rubbish collection does work in reducing the amount of waste to landfill and in reducing costs. It is also clear that after six months of the changed collection frequency, Trial participants have started to adjust their behaviours and survey respondents have indicated their level of comfort with the service has improved.



1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Merri-bek City Council (MCC) is trialling a fortnightly collection of rubbish bins to inform a municipal-wide transition away from weekly rubbish collection. Fortnightly collection is expected to deliver a range of benefits for council and the community, including reductions in collection/disposal costs and increased diversion of organic material out of landfill.

The fortnightly rubbish trial (the Trial) started in July 2025 across approximately 3000 households, apartments, units, businesses and other organisations in parts of Hadfield and Brunswick/Brunswick West. Merri-bek City Council, with support from First Person Consulting (FPC), has monitored the delivery of the Trial from July to December 2025. The results are reported in this document and will inform Council's decision about the approach to municipal-wide fortnightly rubbish collection. The Trial service is expected to continue while council works through feedback for the full municipality roll-out.

1.2 Aims of the fortnightly rubbish trial

The overarching aims of the fortnightly rubbish trial are to

- Test the anticipated benefits of fortnightly collections for the Merri-bek community
- Identify lessons that can help with implementation across the municipality
- Provide information that will help Merri-bek Councillors decide about broader roll-out.

1.3 Objective of the evaluation and structure of this report

This report outlines the findings from monitoring and evaluation of the Trial. This was focused on four high-level questions:

1. What outcomes did the fortnightly Trial achieve?
2. How were participant perspectives influenced by the Trial?
3. What did the Trial show in terms of potential cost implications?
4. What was learned about implementing fortnightly collections?

The structure of this report includes:

- Background to the Trial and the waste system in Merri-bek (Section 2)
- A summary of the data collection methods (Section 3)
- Key findings (Section 4)
- Results in detail relating to:
 - Changes to the contents and composition of bins (Section 5)
 - Participant perspectives on the Trial (Section 6)
 - Cost implications (Section 7)
 - Lessons for Council (Section 8)



2 Background to the Trial

2.1 Current system

In December 2021, MCC decided to make a series of changes to its kerbside waste system. Since then, the system has evolved to reduce environmental impacts, provide a better service for residents and align with statewide standards as outlined by Recycling Victoria. As of the start of 2025, the kerbside collection service included:

- A weekly food and garden organics (FOGO) collection
- A fortnightly mixed recycling collection
- A monthly glass recycling collection
- A weekly rubbish (landfill) collection.

Some of the key issues with the existing system are:

- The overall costs for kerbside collection and disposal are increasing. This cost is passed on directly to the community as cost recovery, emphasising a need for efficiencies and cost-saving measures. The biggest cost driver that Council can influence is the landfill (general rubbish) stream. Costs for this stream have been increasing much faster than other streams. This is particularly as a result of growth in the State government waste levy, which has more than doubled in the last 5 years, increasing from \$65.90 per tonne in 2020-21 to \$169.79 per tonne in 2025-26.
- Almost one third (27%) of rubbish bin contents in Merri-bek are organic, including both food waste and garden organics.¹ This could be disposed of directly in the FOGO bin. A further 8% of rubbish bin contents is food waste in containers and plastic bags that, after being removed from this packaging, could also be disposed of in the FOGO bin.
- A further 9% of rubbish bin contents is recyclable material for which there are alternative disposal pathways, including mixed recyclables (6%), glass (1%) and hazardous or e-waste (2%).

The organic and recyclable content in rubbish bins represents an opportunity to reduce landfill and environmental impacts at the same time as minimising the rate of cost increases for kerbside waste disposal.

2.2 Fortnightly rubbish collection Trial

One of the ways in which other local governments across Victoria have significantly reduced waste collection costs for the community has been through a transition to fortnightly rubbish collection.

Part of the underlying rationale for reducing rubbish collection frequency (while maintaining weekly FOGO) is to **increase people's awareness of the waste** going into their rubbish bin. In turn, this is expected to encourage them to **divert more of their organic and recyclable waste into other bins and services that are less costly and where the materials can be recovered**. Reducing rubbish collection frequency is thus expected to deliver cost savings by lowering collection and disposal costs over time.

As part of its broader waste transition plan, MCC agreed in 2021 to trial fortnightly rubbish collection to confirm it is appropriate for the Merri-bek community.

The Trial has been setup in two parts of Merri-bek:

¹ Kerbside bin audit 2024. Knowwaste for Merri-bek City Council. 2024.



- Brunswick and Brunswick West (~1,500 properties)
- Hadfield (~1,500 properties)

Each zone captures a mix of housing stock and resident demographics with the aim of testing fortnightly collection across a broad spectrum of the Merri-bek community. This includes single-unit dwellings (SUDs; 2490 households), multi-unit dwellings (MUDs; 441 households) and some businesses and other organisations (201 properties).

Residents residing in SUDs are able to choose a rubbish bin that suits their individual needs:

- 80 litres (previous standard size) – at a discount from the standard waste charge
- 120 litres (new standard size) – included in the standard waste charge
- 240 litres – at a higher cost than the standard waste charge (with concessions available)
- 360 litres (using two bins) – at a higher cost than the standard waste charge (with concessions available).

For MUDs, council engaged a contractor to work directly with households prior to the Trial commencing. Each MUD property was assessed to determine the most appropriate bin set-up and use of shared bins.

Roll-out of these bins was also an opportunity to standardise the rubbish bin-lid colour so that it matches state standards (red).

This evaluation of fortnightly rubbish collections covers the first six-month period of the Trial: July to December 2025. However, fortnightly rubbish collections will continue in the trial areas at least until Council makes any further decision on the municipal-wide roll-out. The Trial was supported by:

- Bin exchange and delivery of information about the Trial
- Bin inspections to help monitor and prompt residents about collection cycles, contamination etc.
- SMS reminders
- Community 'pop-up' engagement events
- Customer support via phone, email and the council website.

The key outcomes that council planned to test through running the trial were:

- Whether fortnightly rubbish collection would lead to:
 - people being more aware of their waste and correct disposal practices
 - people better separating their waste into appropriate bins and/or potentially changing their purchasing habits
 - an overall increase in the amount of recoverable material being diverted to FOGO and mixed recycling streams and/or a reduction in the total amount of waste being generated and disposed of by participants.
- Whether fortnightly rubbish collection could be done without any undesirable increase in contamination or public dumping.
- Whether the Trial itself would help participating households to better understand and adapt to fortnightly collection.
- Lessons that council could apply to any future municipal-wide roll-out.



3 Approach to the evaluation

3.1 Key steps

After planning monitoring and evaluation activities in early 2025, FPC and MCC collected a range of data to support the Trial. This included:

- **Waste audits of household bins in the Trial area.**² These weight-based audits were done before the Trial to establish a baseline and then repeated after six months of fortnightly rubbish collections. Auditors followed standard methods to identify and sample the waste from 180 properties³ – 90 each from Hadfield and Brunswick / Brunswick West, with the same properties visited each audit. Data collection involved sorting and categorising the waste from all four kerbside bins. Both standalone households and multi-unit-dwellings were sampled.
- **Bin inspections.**⁴ This involved a series of visual inspections of bins over the course of the Trial to explore any issues of contamination, overfilling and public bin use. The team inspected 1991 bins over the course of the Trial. This included tagging bins to help raise awareness about overfull bins, what goes in each bin and collection week reminders.
- **Data from rubbish collection trucks.** Dedicated waste collection trucks were used for the Trial to help monitor waste tonnages. The total number of bins emptied and weight collected was collated and provided to council on a fortnightly basis.
- **Pop-up engagement activities in Trial areas.**⁵ MCC ran 9 pop-up events in activity centres and public spaces of Trial suburbs. These aimed to build awareness of the Trial, provide a point of contact and understand barriers and community sentiment. Data collection at these events included a simple survey of people's sentiment about the Trial (n=93).
- **Surveys of Trial participants.** MCC and FPC surveyed Trial residents using an online questionnaire before and during the Trial. Participants were invited as part of the information mailed to each property as part of the Trial. A voucher incentive to encourage participation in the surveys was offered. 133 valid responses were received in the pre-Trial survey in June 2025 and 352 in the follow-up in December 2025. As noted below, this feedback provides useful insights on the Trial and fortnightly rubbish collection but should not be used as a representative sample of Trial participants.
- **Interviews of trial participants.** FPC interviewed 11 households who volunteered to share their perspective on the Trial after six months. These interviews built on the survey data to further explore people's experiences of fortnightly collections. Interviews were done either online or by phone.
- **Interviews with project staff.** FPC interviewed a range of key staff and service providers to explore any additional insights on the Trial implementation. This included two waste collection drivers, two bin inspectors and four key MCC staff.
- **Documentation of key aspects of trial delivery:** Merri-bek staff collated council records about Trial implementation including bin allocations, financial modelling, customer service interactions and observations recorded by the street cleansing team.

These data have been collated, analysed and integrated into this overall evaluation report

² Fortnightly rubbish trial: Trial waste audits. January 2026. Knowwaste on behalf of Merri-bek City Council.

³ [Guidelines for Auditing Kerbside Waste in Victoria](#): Leading practice for measuring kerbside waste, recycling and green organics. 2009. Sustainability Victoria.

⁴ Fortnightly rubbish trial: Project report. January 2026. Reground on behalf of Merri-bek City Council.

⁵ Fortnightly bin trial: Engagement outcomes report. Conversation Co. on behalf of Merri-bek City Council.



3.2 Limitations

There are several limitations to this evaluation that need to be kept in mind when interpreting the data:

- Waste volumes and types fluctuate week-to-week and seasonally. As such, small changes in the audited weight of bin contents do not necessarily reflect meaningful changes in disposal behaviour. Longer-term monitoring is typically necessary to understand whether small observations are reflective of underlying systematic change. That said, the larger the change, the greater the likelihood that it reflects a meaningful change in behaviour. Only substantial changes in audited bin weights/proportions of materials have been discussed in detail in this report. These observations have also been triangulated against other data where available.
- Monitoring of the Trial has only been able to be done for six months. This is because of the need for the results to help inform council decision-making. While the patterns of change observed at this point are expected to continue (e.g. increase in people's comfort with the system), a longer window of monitoring would be needed to test and demonstrate this.
- The participant survey is not necessarily a representative sample of Trial participants. While all households were invited to respond, the response rate for pre-Trial and six-month surveys was 4% and 11%⁶, respectively. While this is a workable sample, the greater issue is the potential for self-selection bias among the respondents (i.e. those that are more interested or upset by an issue are more likely to respond). Examples are identified in Section 6. This simply means that the feedback and insights need to be taken as indicative and that they may not accurately reflect the views of the broader Trial community, particularly for people who are neutral about the change.

⁶ Note this is comparable to other waste-related surveys from councils – e.g. Yarra Ranges in 2023 had an 11% response rate to its [community waste survey](#); Hobsons Bay had a 4% response rate in relation to its [waste and recycling strategy](#); Brimbank had a 1% response rate to its [waste reforms survey](#).



4 Key findings

The fortnightly rubbish trial has been a significant investment by MCC into better understanding the feasibility of fortnightly rubbish collections in Merri-bek. While there are varied views in the Trial community on fortnightly rubbish collection, overall, the Trial has successfully demonstrated that fortnightly rubbish collection is achieving its key goals:

- **There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of food waste being disposed of in FOGO bins and a corresponding decrease in what is being disposed of in the rubbish bin.** Between June 2025 and December 2025 the proportion of food waste being disposed of in FOGO bins has almost doubled – going up from 29% to 56%. In Hadfield, the improvement has been even more pronounced, with 2.5 times more food waste ending up in FOGO bins (an increase from 22% to 56%).
- **Because of this change in disposal the weight of rubbish bins being collected each fortnight has dropped.** Data directly from waste collection services show a decrease of 19% in the average weight of rubbish bins collected per fortnight – from 14.1 kg per fortnight per property serviced (pre-Trial) to 11.4 kg per fortnight in December 2025.
- In aggregate, **the overall diversion rate in the Trial area has increased from a baseline of 59% pre-Trial to 65%.** This far exceeds the average diversion rate of 48% for councils in the Port Phillip region.
- While FOGO contamination has been a concern in other council, **the overall FOGO contamination rate did not change, staying stable at 1%.** While there were increases in recycling contamination in Brunswick / Brunswick West, these have been offset by decreases in Hadfield. They appear to be driven largely by people trying to recycle types of paper, metal and plastic that are not recyclable (e.g. coffee cups).
- **The changes above are being driven by residents paying more attention to their waste and how they are disposing of it.** Around two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents reported they had changed key waste-related behaviours. This includes using their FOGO bins more, more carefully sorting recyclables and changing purchasing decisions to reduce the waste coming into their homes.
- **The potential cost savings from the changes, if they were to be rolled-out council-wide, are estimated to be in the order of \$1.3 million to \$2.1 million per year,** with potential for even more cost savings with higher diversion of food waste from the rubbish bin.

Data on public bin use and dumping does not show any change attributable to the Trial – despite public concern that this could be a consequence of less frequent rubbish collections. That said, longitudinal data across Merri-bek does indicate that public dumping is a growing issue to address regardless of the collection frequency of the rubbish service – consistent with trends across the metropolitan region.

Importantly, **the Trial has also demonstrated that once people adjust to fortnightly collection, their views become more positive and they find it easier.** After just six months of the Trial, 37% of survey respondents found the fortnightly collection to be ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ – up 7% from the pre-trial survey. This trend is expected to continue as people get more used to the fortnightly collections and changes to behaviour become more of a habit.

In terms of overall sentiment, there was a split between suburbs - 65% of respondents from Brunswick / Brunswick West being positive or neutral about the prospect of fortnightly collections as compared to 35% for Hadfield respondents. The main issues that people reported having with the transition to fortnightly rubbish collection were:



- **A lack of capacity in bins.** This was specifically mentioned by 10% of survey respondents and is supported by evidence from the bin audits and inspections. These data sources showed over half (57%) of rubbish bins were being presented full and around 2-10% being regularly 'overfull'
- **Concerns over smell and cleanliness.** This was specifically mentioned by 15% of survey respondents. It relates to both concerns about putting food waste in the FOGO bins without being in some sort of bag, as well as concerns over having items such as nappies and pet waste in rubbish bins for two weeks.

The two key factors that appeared to drive how easily survey respondents adapted to the fortnightly collection were:

- Household size – **respondents from larger households found the fortnightly collection more difficult.** Those with children in nappies had further difficulties but the additional impact was much less than household size alone.
- Suburb – **respondents from Hadfield were more likely to report that fortnightly rubbish collection is difficult** as compared to respondents from southern suburbs. This appears to be independent of household size, housing type or whether families have children in nappies. Importantly it also does not appear to have impacted their actual performance in terms of adaption - Hadfield improved food waste diversion and contamination levels more substantially than occurred in Brunswick / Brunswick West.

When considering the potential for broader roll-out, **several council support mechanisms appeared to be important.** This included:

- Calendars and SMS reminders to help residents put the correct bin out.
- Providing flexibility in bin size selection
- Providing a range of concessions that, in turn, helped people to access larger bins at no additional cost.

There were some gaps in people's awareness of the bin options and concessions. This is a potential area of opportunity to enhance the already good level of council support, particularly for any future roll-out.

Scheduling additional services during periods such as Christmas may further help people during peak periods of waste generation.

Concerns about smell and cleanliness are more difficult to address. However, **there were gaps in people's understanding of their options and approaches with FOGO, meaning that there may be opportunities here too** – for example in greater promotion of paper bags and kitchen caddies and education on how to use the FOGO bin more effectively. This may also help in further increasing the diversion rate for food organics.

Ultimately, the Trial has shown that fortnightly rubbish collection does work in reducing the amount of waste to landfill and in reducing costs. It is also clear that after six months of the changed collection frequency, Trial participants have started to adjust their behaviours and survey respondents have indicated their level of comfort with the service has improved.



5 Changes to the contents and composition of bins

5.1 Disposal of food waste

The most notable shift in the first six months of the Trial is that **substantially less food waste is being disposed of in rubbish bins. It is, instead, being disposed of in the FOGO bins:**

- Prior to the Trial, around two-thirds (68%) of all the food waste being generated by households was ending up in rubbish bins (Figure 1). Only around a third (29%) was disposed of in FOGO bins.
- **After the first six months of the Trial, less food waste is ending up in rubbish bins – just 43% compared to the 68% pre-Trial.**
- This food waste is, instead, going into FOGO bins, where it will eventually be turned into compost. **Between June 2025 and December 2025 the proportion of all food waste disposed of in FOGO bins has almost doubled – going up from 29% to 56%.**
- This pattern is broadly repeated at the suburb level (Figure 2). Both households in Hadfield and in Brunswick / Brunswick West increased the proportion of food waste that was going into FOGO bins. **This increase was most pronounced in Hadfield - coming off a low base of just 22%, the rate has increased 2.5 times and now 56% of all food waste is disposed of in FOGO.**
- This change is also reflected in the composition of rubbish bins. Prior to the Trial, around a third (34%) of the average rubbish bin in the Trial area was comprised of food waste. That figure has now dropped after six months to just 20% (Figure 3).
- Interestingly, **a substantial proportion of the reduction in food waste has come from households that disposed of large amounts of food in their rubbish** (Figure 4). Before the Trial, 43% of single-unit dwellings disposed of two or more kilograms of food waste per week. They alone accounted for 87% of all food waste in the rubbish bins. After six months of fortnightly rubbish collection, only 16% of households dispose of two or more kilograms of food per week in the rubbish. (see Appendix A for further details).

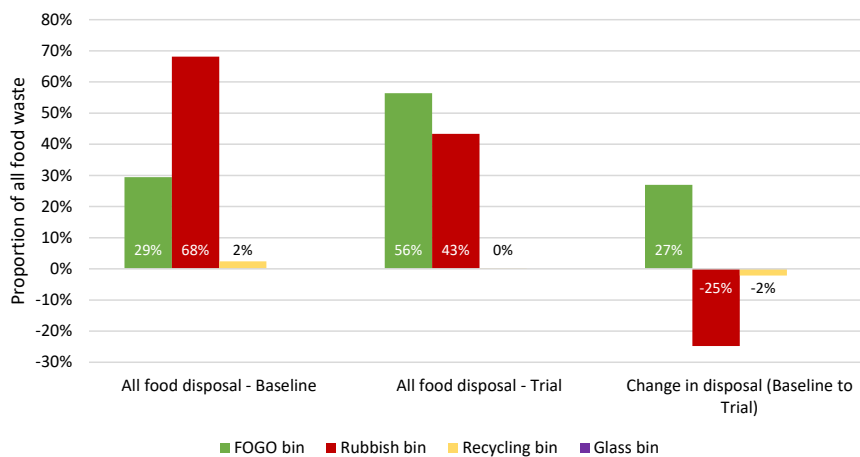


Figure 1. Proportion of all food waste disposed of in different bins during June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial).



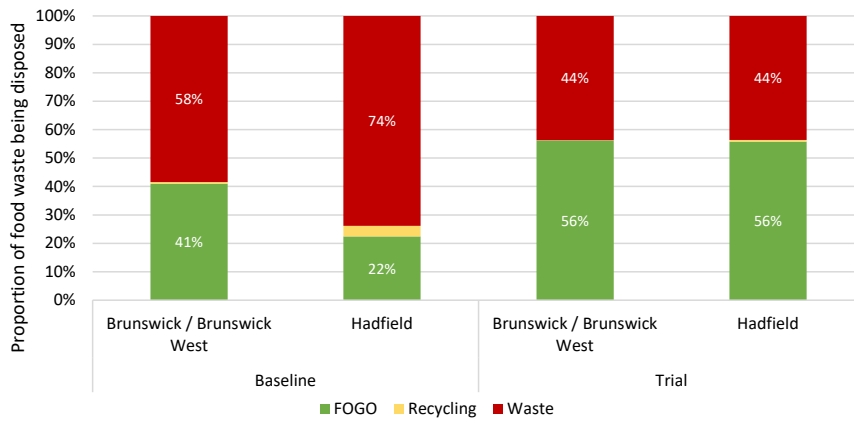


Figure 2. Proportion of all food waste disposed of in different bins during June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial) in both Brunswick / Brunswick West and Hadfield.

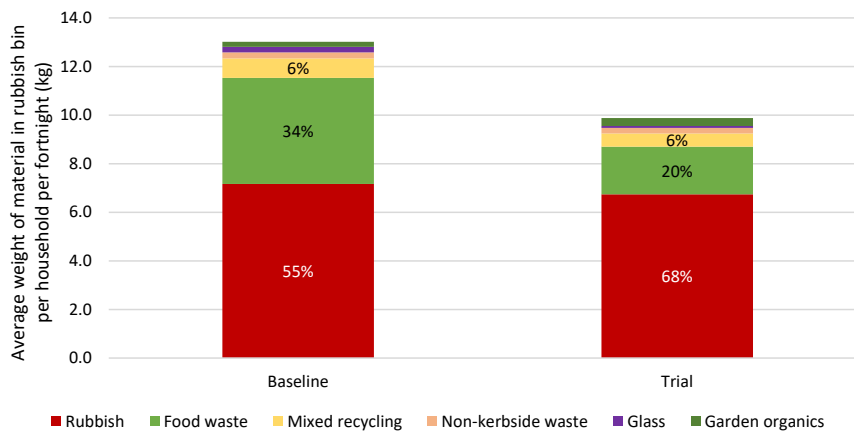


Figure 3. Average weight of waste disposed of in rubbish bins during June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial).



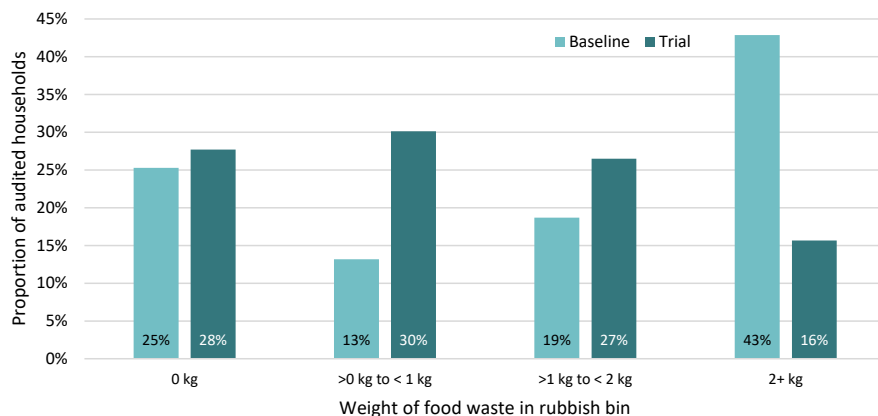


Figure 4. Proportion of households with different amounts of food waste (note - data is only presented from single-unit dwellings to simplify interpretation; n=91) during June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial).

These changes clearly show that participants in the Trial areas are changing their behaviours in response to the fortnightly rubbish collection schedule. Survey feedback supports this, with responses showing:

- More survey respondents reported being 'very aware' of the waste they produce after the Trial** had run for six months – rising to 57% from 50% in the pre-trial survey (Figure 5). Given self-reported awareness levels were already relatively high across respondents (88% were 'aware' or 'very aware' in the pre-Trial survey), this modest increase is still an important outcome. Comments in surveys and interviews reinforced this, highlighting the heightened level of thought and attention participants were putting into managing different components of their waste – particularly food waste.

It's helped us make better use of our green bin, recycling bin and generally made us think more about what we're using (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- As part of this increased awareness and attention, **most survey respondents (66%) reported that they had changed key waste-related behaviours** (Figure 6). In particular, **45% of people reported using their FOGO bin more.**

It took a while to get used to it, but it has meant that I now feed my worm farm, and place more food waste in the green bin. The change has meant that I now am more conscious of what goes in the rubbish bin. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- In line with this, 57% of people self-reported that they dispose of all their food and garden organics in the FOGO bin, up from 38% pre-Trial. While audit data suggests that only around 28% of bins actually had no food waste in them (Figure 4), 58% had less than one kilogram, which may better reflect the reality of what people mean as 'all' their food waste.



- Survey and interview feedback suggests that:
 - Some of this behavioural shift is about people putting more deliberate effort into sorting their waste.
 - Some of it relates to people better understanding what can and cannot be disposed of in different bins, particularly the FOGO bin.

That's been like a real game changer ... I'm not going to pick through salad and chicken bones ... I can just take the whole plate and put it in (Community interviewee – December 2025)

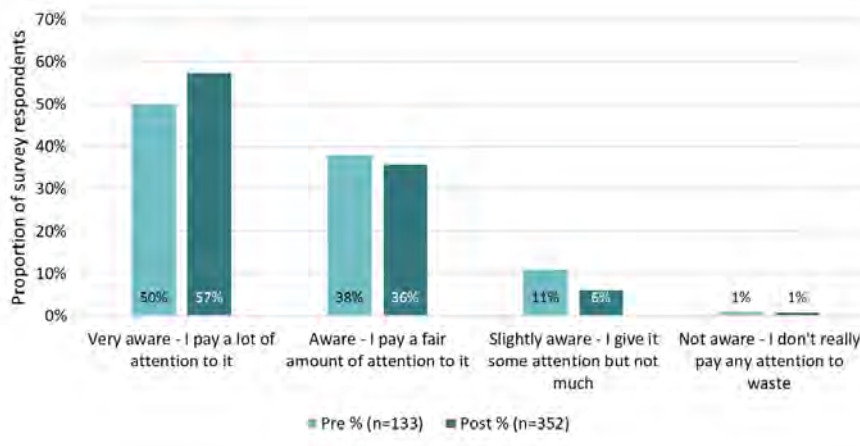


Figure 5. Survey respondents’ reported level of awareness about their waste before and after six months of the Trial.

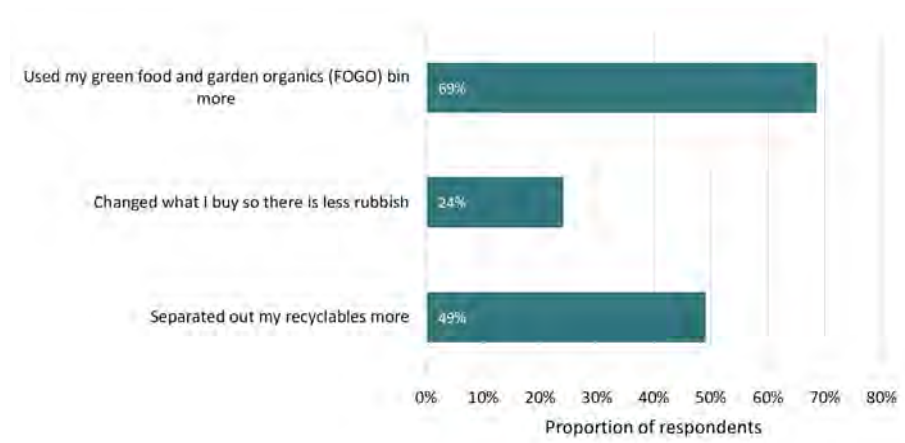


Figure 6. Survey respondents' self-reported changes in behaviour as a result of the Trial. n=352.



Changing behaviours to make it work

A Brunswick West resident living with his elderly parents described a neutral, adaptable stance toward Merri-bek's fortnightly rubbish trial. He notes that he and his family adjust their output to fit whatever bin size or frequency is set by Council whether weekly or fortnightly, noting the red bin sometimes overflows slightly but they handled it by storing a bag in the driveway.

They've increased recycling efforts, like flattening cardboard and rinsing milk containers as a result of the trial and, although they are composting at home, they have also increased the use of FOGO. Despite complaining about the change at first, this resident has observed his family adapting to the trial regardless of their concerns.

"Mum's not keen on keeping food scraps at all. She doesn't like the idea of anything to do with food scraps. But she sort of just does whatever the council tells her. So, when the council says, keep your food scraps, put them in this bin, she started doing that. And then she mumbles about it and complains about it, but at the end of the day, she will do what it says."

Notably, they found support provided by Council, such as fridge printouts, useful for remembering collection schedules, though bin night still sparks momentary confusion each week. He advised he would be happy with fortnightly continuing, praising simple aids like fridge charts and drawing parallels to granular waste sorting systems in Europe and Japan that shape behaviour effectively.

(Based on interview with Trial participant, November 2025)

5.2 Disposal of other waste categories

Aside from food waste, **the only other waste category that changed markedly was glass** (Table 1). While there were changes in how other categories of waste were disposed of, they tended to be small. For most, it is not yet clear whether this reflects a systemic change in disposal behaviour or natural variability. Key points here are that:

- **The vast majority of garden organics were overwhelmingly disposed of in the FOGO bin – both before and during the Trial.** This category of waste was also the most prevalent (Figure 8), accounting for about a third (35%) of the overall waste disposed of by households in the Trial area.
- **Most rubbish was disposed of in the rubbish bins - 84% and 86% before and during the Trial, respectively.** While some rubbish contaminated mixed recycling bins, glass bins and FOGO bins, this did not change markedly once collections became fortnightly.
- Although around a third (32%) of survey respondents reported that they separated out their recyclables more (Figure 6), **mixed recycling was stable. Most mixed recyclables (85%) continued to be disposed of in the mixed recycling bin**, leaving around 15% being disposed of in the rubbish bin – something that represents a further opportunity for council.
- The minimal change in the distribution of waste among bins also means that there were **no overall changes in contamination rates across the streams.** While FOGO contamination has been a concern in other council, the overall FOGO contamination rate did not change from 1%. The



exception to the above, however, is that suburb-level analysis shows **there has been some increase in contamination of mixed recycling bins in the Brunswick / Brunswick West region**. It increased from 9% to 23%. This change was masked overall by a decrease in contamination rates in Hadfield bins, which dropped from 26% to 19% during the same period. The increase in contamination in Brunswick / Brunswick West appears to be driven largely by increases in materials that are similar to recyclable materials but that are not technically recyclable themselves (at least not through the mixed recyclable kerbside system) – this includes:

- non-recyclable paper, including coffee cups (up 4%)
 - non-recyclable metal (up 3%)
 - non-recyclable rigid plastics (up 2%)
 - donatable goods (up 2%)
 - food in containers (up 1%).
- **The proportion of glass captured in glass recycling bins increased from 84% to 93%**, with corresponding decreases in the amount of glass in rubbish and mixed recycling bins.
 - **While there were small shifts in where non-kerbside materials were being disposed, these shifts are unlikely to represent meaningful changes in behaviour.** These materials (e.g. e-waste, hazardous materials) were relatively low volume overall (Figure 8) and tended to be highly varied between households.
 - In aggregate, the changes above mean that **the overall diversion rate in the Trial area has increased from a baseline of 59% pre-Trial to 65%**. This is far above the average diversion rate of 48% for councils in the Port Phillip region.⁷ The general expectation is that this rate will continue to improve as households further refine and improve their waste generation and disposal practices to accommodate the fortnightly rubbish collection schedule.

⁷ <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-local-government-waste-data-dashboard>



Table 1. Proportion of waste that was disposed of in different bins during June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial). Arrows indicate notable changes (>5%) in how different materials are being disposed of, with green arrows representing positive changes and red negative (less desirable) changes.

Waste category	Disposal stream ⁸	Baseline audit	Trial audit
Food waste	FOGO bin	29%	56% ↑
	Rubbish bin	68%	43% ↓
	Mixed recycling bin	2%	0%
Garden organics	FOGO bin	98%	97%
	Rubbish bin	2%	3%
Rubbish	FOGO bin	1%	2%
	Rubbish bin	84%	86%
	Mixed recycling bin	14%	11%
	Glass bin	1%	1%
Mixed recycling	Rubbish bin	16%	15%
	Mixed recycling bin	84%	85%
Glass	Rubbish bin	6%	2%
	Mixed recycling bin	10%	5%
	Glass bin	84%	93% ↑
Non-kerbside waste ⁹	Rubbish bin	74%	70%
	Mixed recycling bin	26%	30%

⁸ If a bin is not listed for a waste stream then the proportion disposed in that bin is 0% for both the baseline and Trial

⁹ E.g. hazardous waste, e-waste, tetrapaks that could be recycled through the container deposit scheme



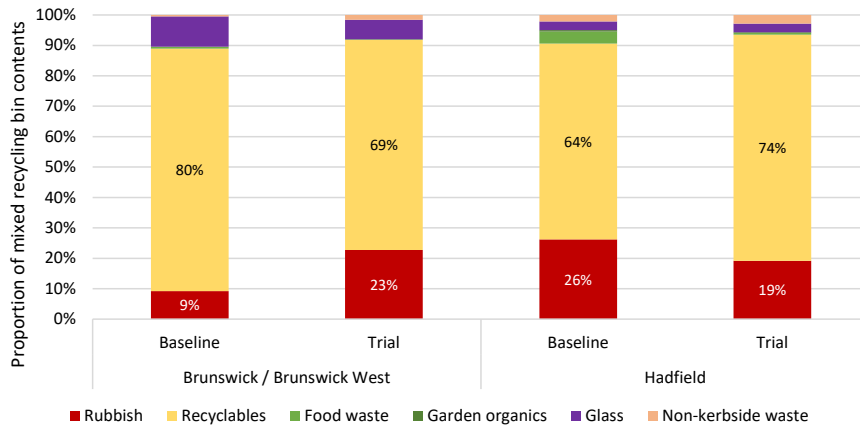


Figure 7. Contents of mixed recycling bins in Brunswick / Brunswick West and Hadfield during June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial).

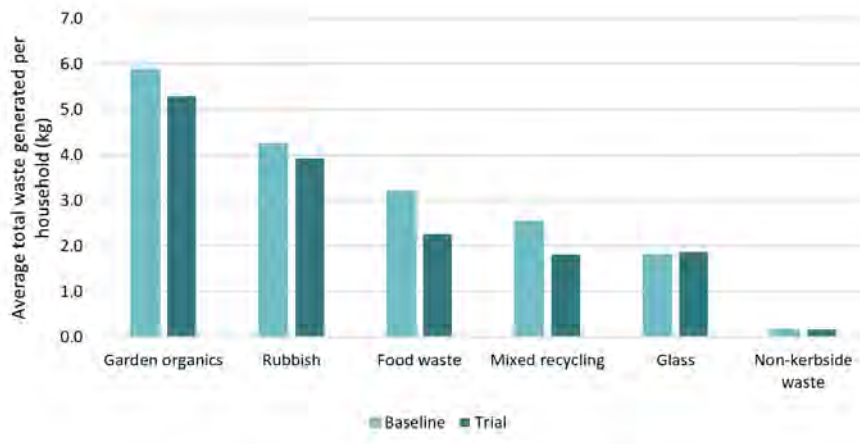


Figure 8. Average total waste generated per household during June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial).



5.3 Waste generation volumes

In addition to changes in how waste is being distributed among the different kerbside bins, there is also evidence that the level of waste being disposed of in those bins has decreased:

- Data from rubbish collection trucks show a **decrease in the average weight of rubbish collected from households in the Trial area** (Figure 9). This dropped from 14.1 kg per fortnight per property serviced (pre-Trial) to 11.4 kg per fortnight per property serviced across the Trial. This represents a decrease of 19% and is a pattern observed in both the Hadfield and Brunswick / Brunswick West Trial areas.
- Data from the baseline and Trial audits show a similar decrease. The average rubbish bin weight per household audited decreased from 13.0 kg per fortnight to 9.9 kg per fortnight – a 24% decrease (Figure 3).
- The **audit data suggests that much of this decrease is driven by having less food waste in the rubbish bin**. This is because more food waste is being disposed of in the FOGO bin, as discussed in Section 5.1. It is also because there has been an overall decrease in the amount of food waste disposed of in the kerbside system – an average of 0.9 kg per household (Figure 8).
- There was also a small decrease in the amount of recyclable material (0.1 kg per household - 6%) and rubbish (0.2 kg per household – 6%) in rubbish bins.
- It is unclear how much the decreases in food waste, rubbish and mixed recycling are part of normal variability versus how much they reflect more systematic changes. However, as outlined in Figure 6, **16% of survey respondents indicated that they have changed their purchasing habits to accumulate less rubbish**. For example, several respondents mentioned they now try to purchase products with less packaging. **This suggests that at least some of the overall decrease in waste volumes is driven by broader changes in community behaviour**. Ongoing monitoring would be helpful here.

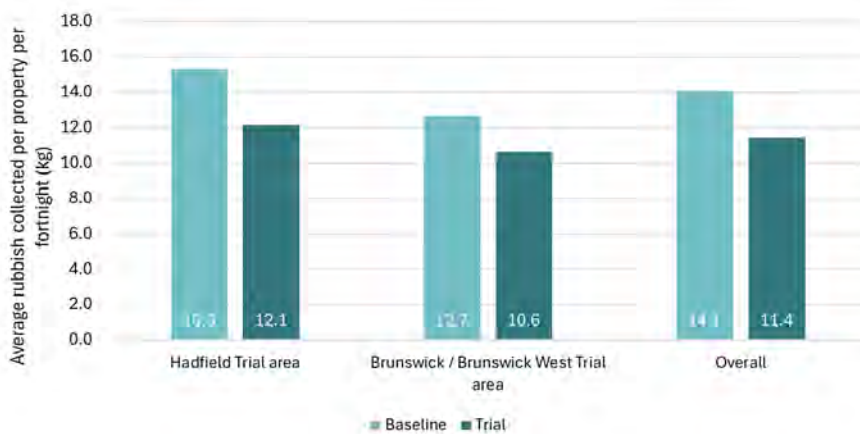


Figure 9. Average weight of waste collected from kerbside rubbish bins (per fortnight) during the Trial and the average from the Hadfield and Brunswick / Brunswick West suburbs in prior year (July 2024 to June 2025).



5.4 Presentation rate and bin fullness

Unsurprisingly, while overall waste generation was lower in the Trial, there was an increase in how many people were putting their bins out (the presentation rate) and how full those bins were (Figure 10). Key points here are that:

- Presentation of rubbish, mixed recycling and FOGO bins all increased.
- Based on estimates during audits, the average fullness of rubbish and mixed recycling bins also increased. This was most notable for rubbish bins, which increased by 20% - from 68% to an average of 88% full. More than half (57%) of the rubbish bins in the Trial audit were 100% full, compared to just 35% in the pre-trial audit.
- Observations by bin inspectors aligned with these results. They showed a spike in the number of bins that were considered 'overfull' in the weeks following implementation of the Trial (Figure 12). This peaked at 14% for properties in Brunswick / Brunswick West and 21% for properties in Hadfield. It then levelled off in the 2-10% range for the remaining period of the Trial with the exception of a temporary peak of 14% in the collection following the AFL Grand Final long-weekend.

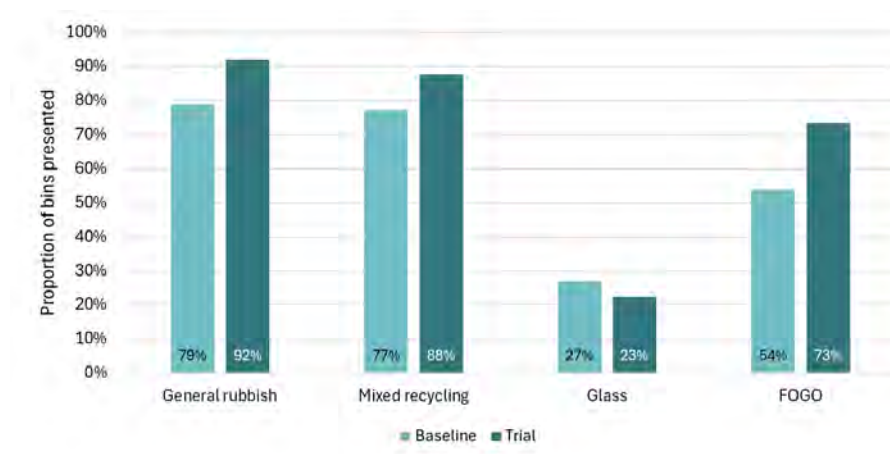


Figure 10. Proportion of bins presented for collection at properties audited prior to (pre-trial baseline) and during the Trial (based on waste audit data).



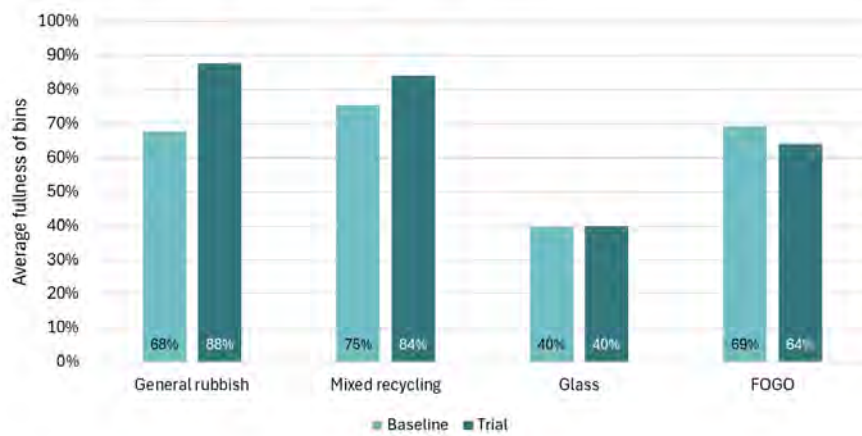


Figure 11. Average fullness of audited bins prior to (pre-trial baseline) and during the Trial (based on waste audit data).



Figure 12. Proportion of inspected bins judged to be 'overfull' by bin inspection staff during two inspections prior to the Trial and fortnightly throughout the Trial.



5.5 Dumping and public bins use

One of the concerns with the transition to fortnightly rubbish collection is that it will encourage a greater level of public dumping of household rubbish. 9% of survey respondents provided feedback that they had seen an increase in rubbish being dumped in public bins or public places. This was a key source of frustration and dissatisfaction these respondents expressed with the Trial.

The amount of rubbish that has been dumped on the streets, at the local shops and parks is disgusting. (Survey respondent – December 2025).

However, there is no quantitative evidence that dumped rubbish increased during the trial. MCC data, instead, points to a broader problem with illegal dumping that has been growing through time. MCC has been collecting data on reports of illegal dumping for many years and commissioned additional inspections of public bins as part of the Trial. These data show:

- **Rates of public bins being used to dump household waste are volatile. There was no clear trend or increase in the proportion of public bins that were experiencing dumping during the fortnightly collection trial** (Figure 13). Pre-trial auditing showed that household dumping in public bins was already occurring prior to the Trial. It has since continued, fluctuating around an overall average of 29% of bins having evidence of dumping. It is a recurring issue in both suburbs, but consistently higher in Hadfield than Brunswick. Reflecting the ongoing significance of household dumping, one public bin in Hadfield was removed in the week ending 2 November 2025 due to persistent household dumping.
- Broader, suburb-level data on reports of illegal dumping are outlined in Figure 14. Although these show aggregated data across all of Hadfield and Brunswick West, they do not show any clear change in trend between the Trial period in 2025 and the preceding year. Importantly, change between these two periods is just 4% - a minor change relative to broader trends in reports of dumping. **Over the last five years, for example, complaints about illegal dumping in these suburbs have increased 67%, or 14% per year on year.** Thus, while observations of illegal dumping are clearly frustrating residents in Trial areas, they may be related more to broader increases in dumping behaviour than any Trial specific increases. Irrespective of the cause, however, this clearly represents a significant issue for MCC to consider.



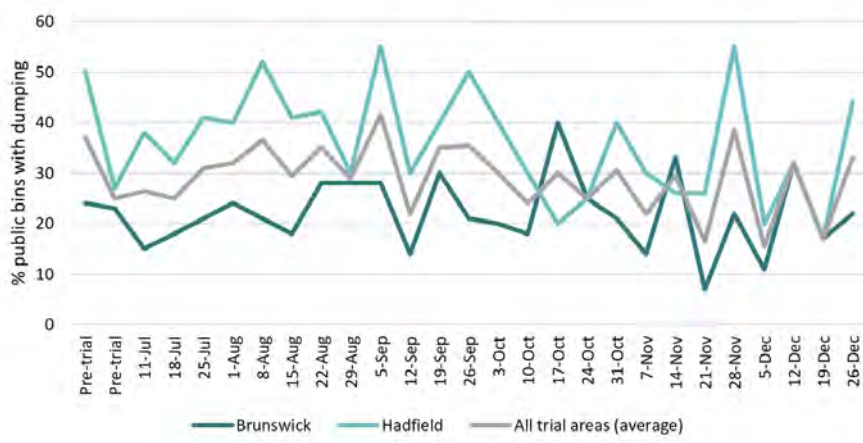


Figure 13. Rates of dumping of household waste in public bins in the Trial areas.¹⁰

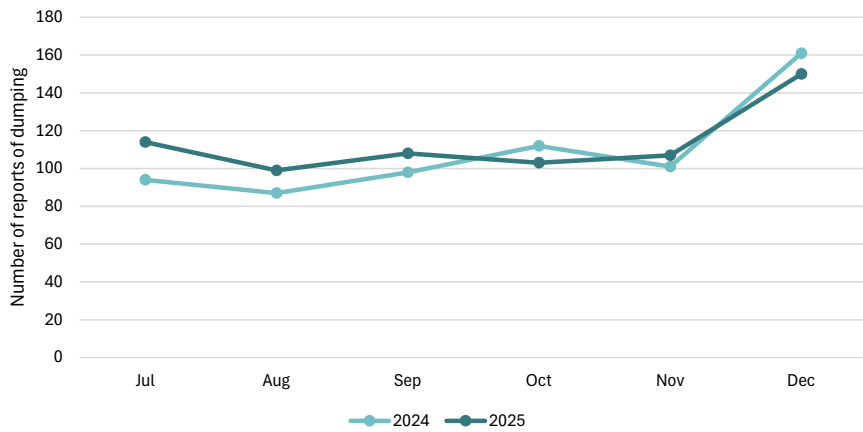


Figure 14. Merri-bek City Council data on reports of illegal dumping for the Trial period (July to December 2025) and the equivalent period in the previous year (municipal-wide).

¹⁰ Data from *Fortnightly rubbish trial: Project report. January 2026. Reground on behalf of Merri-bek City Council.*



6 Participant perspectives on the Trial

6.1 Sentiment towards fortnightly rubbish collection

Survey respondents and interviewees were highly varied in their views on fortnightly collection. Some found the change to be challenging and highly unappealing. Others praised council's work in this area and were welcoming of the economic, environmental and other benefits it would bring.

It is important to remember when interpreting the results below that the responses to the survey are not necessarily a representative sample of Trial participants. While all households were invited to respond, there is potential for bias in the sample. For example:

- A social media post on a community forum in the last days of the pre-Trial survey called for people to complete the survey to express their dissatisfaction with the proposed fortnightly rubbish collection. This led to large spike in responses. While most were filtered out during data cleaning as ineligible (i.e. from outside the Trial area), it highlights the potential impact of small numbers of dissatisfied community members on survey representativeness.
- Some of the demographic data also points to a skew in responses. Around 18% of the responses were from households who have children in nappies. This is at least 50% (or more) of the estimated proportion of households across Merri-bek that have nappy-aged children.¹¹

While these points do not invalidate the feedback and insights, it highlights that the results may not accurately reflect the views of the broader Trial community – particularly for people who are reasonably neutral about the change.

Overall, 37% of survey respondents found the fortnightly collection to be 'easy' or 'very easy'. This reflected an improvement from the pre-Trial survey. Similarly, the proportion finding the fortnightly collections to be 'very difficult' decreased from 41% to 34%. Thus, while some people did experience difficulties with the fortnightly rubbish collection, the reality was more positive than expected.

There was some concern in my house before the trial started but it has helped us naturally recycle and use the organic bin more, reducing our waste. We haven't fully filled the landfill bin since the switch to 2 weeks. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

Another respondent articulated a similar sentiment – that they found it difficult but, surprisingly, workable:

Overall, I thought it would be impossible, but was somewhat pleasantly surprised as we put focus on the green bin usage. But, there is no ifs or buts, it is like a rubbish whack-a-mole and juggle for my family. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

¹¹ Based on estimates from 2021 ABS Census data there are 9731 children 0-4 in the MCC LGA. Among the 74,384 households, this equates to a maximum of 13% of households with nappy aged children.



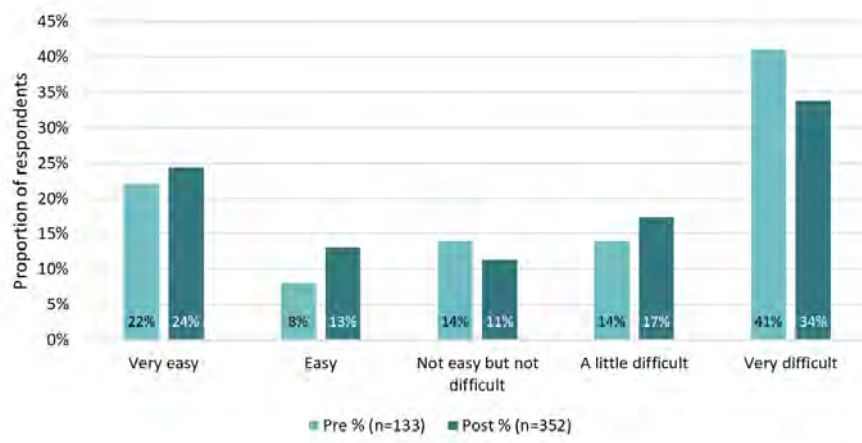


Figure 15. Survey respondents' perceptions of how easy they thought the fortnightly rubbish collection would be / was.

Views about the ease of fortnightly rubbish collections are expected to further improve through time as people continue to adapt their behaviours (see Section 5.1) and/or upsize their bins to match their needs. In this context, several factors appeared to influence how difficult households found the fortnightly rubbish collection:

- **Larger households reported having more difficulty coping with fortnightly collections** (Figure 16). While survey respondents from one and two-person households tended to rate it as relatively 'easy', larger households on average tended to rate it as 'difficult'.
- The challenges of nappies were mentioned in a range of survey responses. **Households with nappies did tend to rate the fortnightly collection as slightly more difficult than other households, but it appeared to matter less than the overall household size** (Figure 16).
- Survey respondents from Hadfield tended to report higher levels of difficulty than respondents from Brunswick / Brunswick West (Figure 17). This difference is reasonably substantial (2.6 in Hadfield versus 3.7 in Brunswick / Brunswick West). This difference in sentiment is reflected in people's overall views of fortnightly rubbish collection:
 - Feedback from pop-up community consultations (Figure 18) showed around 68% of respondents from Brunswick / Brunswick West pop-ups were positive or neutral as compared to 47% for respondents from Hadfield.
 - Survey feedback provided similar results, with 65% of respondents from Brunswick / Brunswick West being positive or neutral compared to just 35% for Hadfield respondents (Figure 19).
- The difference between suburbs appears to be largely independent of household size, which does not differ substantially between the two suburbs (2.9 in Hadfield compared to 2.8 in Brunswick / Brunswick West). Instead, **other factors appear to be driving the differing perspectives of the two suburbs**. As outlined in Section 5.3, Hadfield households produce greater quantities of rubbish (12.1 verses 10.6 kg per fortnight) but, again, it is not clear what the underlying factor is here.



- Overall, standalone houses appeared to rate the fortnightly collection as more difficult (Figure 17). However, this difference appears to relate more to the fact that standalone houses tend to have larger households – an average of 3.0 people per household as compared to an average of 2.5 people per household in apartments, units and townhouses. Thus, when considered independent of household size, **dwelling type does not appear to have any consistent or substantive impact on the perceived difficulty** of fortnightly collection, as shown in Figure 20.

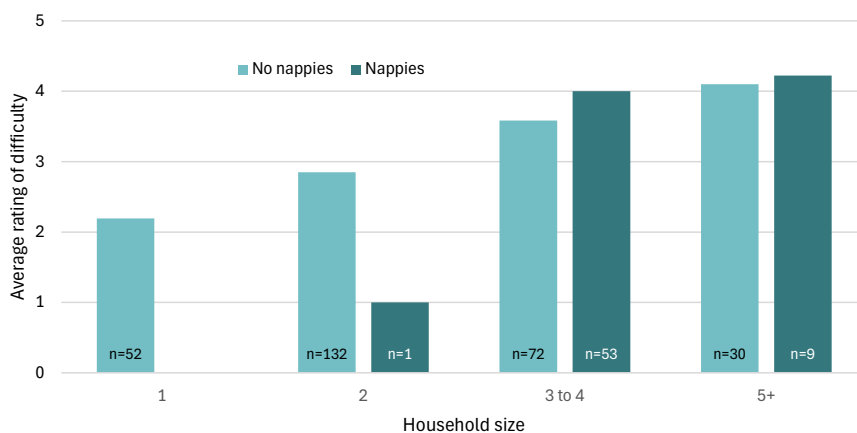


Figure 16. Average rating of the difficulty of fortnightly rubbish collections (where 1 is ‘very easy’ and 5 is ‘very difficult’) for households of different size (total size including children) and whether or not they have children in nappies. Note that the number of responses has been included to illustrate the low sample size in some cases.

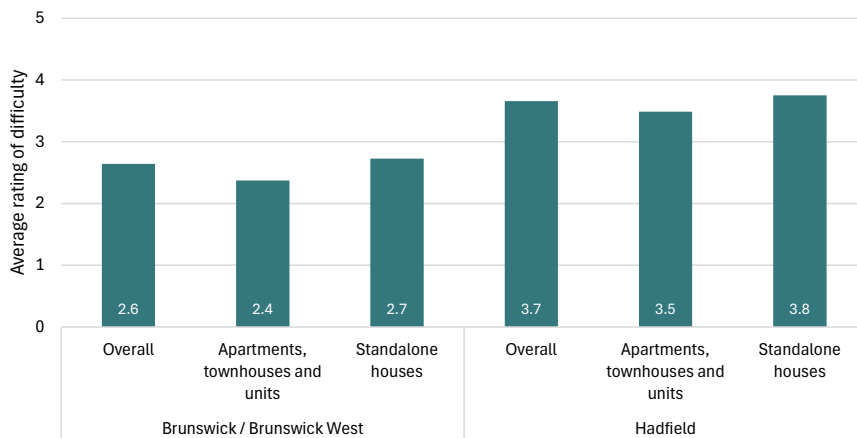


Figure 17. Average rating of the difficulty of fortnightly rubbish collections (where 1 is ‘very easy’ and 5 is ‘very difficult’) for households in the two Trial areas and for different housing types.



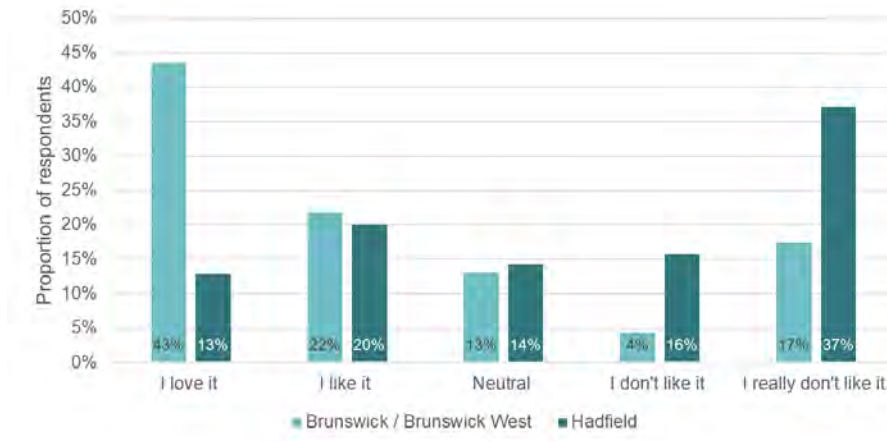


Figure 18. Feedback from community engagement ‘pop-ups’ showing relative sentiment towards the fortnightly rubbish collection (n=182).

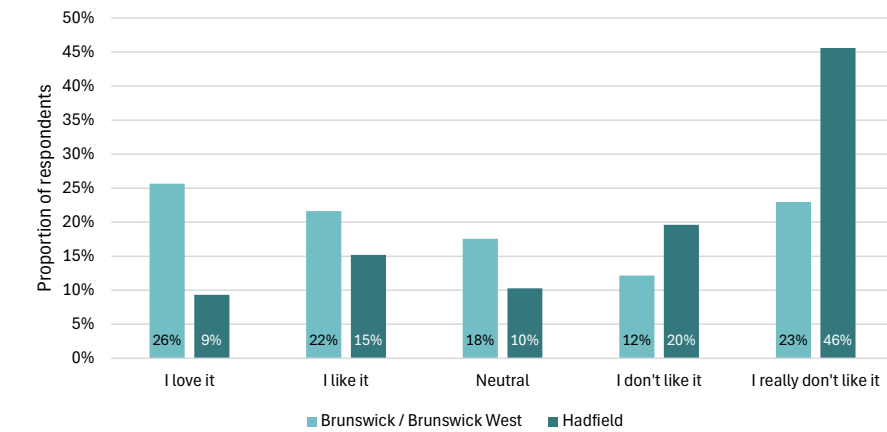


Figure 19. Feedback from survey respondents in Hadfield (n=204) and Brunswick / Brunswick West (n=148) showing the relative sentiment towards the fortnightly rubbish collection.



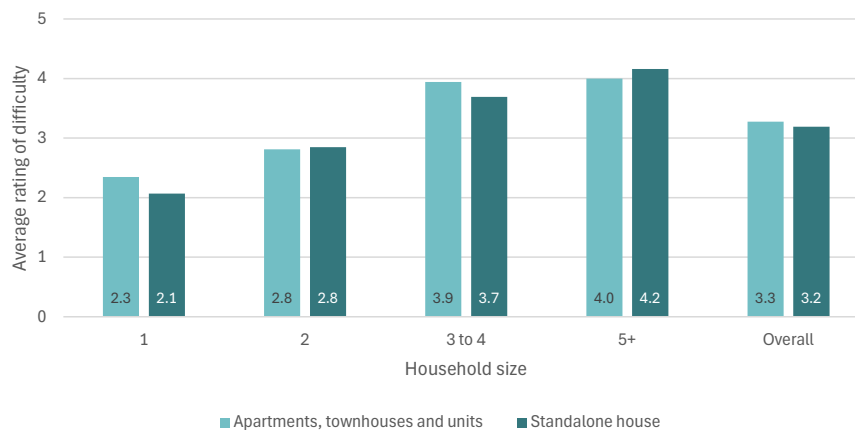


Figure 20. Average rating of the difficulty of fortnightly rubbish collections (where 1 is 'very easy' and 5 is 'very difficult') for households of different sizes and housing types.

In addition to the challenges and issues of the Trial (discussed above and below), several interviewees and survey respondents also highlighted the benefits and positivity of the Trial. As outlined in Section 5, this included improved awareness of waste and changes to waste behaviours. However, it also included feedback around:

- General support for MCC's work in this space and the broader need to reduce waste (3/352 responses)
- Support for the environmental benefits that the changes would lead to (12/352 responses)
- Support for the amenity benefits of having fewer trucks and bins on the street (3/352 responses).

This is a great initiative - even with fortnightly collection, we never have a full bin. It's also fantastic for the amenity in the area. Fewer truck movements and not as many bins on the street greatly improve the liveability of the area. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

6.2 Issues and challenges

Survey respondents and interviewees mentioned a range of issues and challenges with the move to fortnightly rubbish collection. These issues underpin the overarching views above.

- **One of the key challenges that some people experienced with fortnightly collection was not having enough room for all of their waste.** This was mentioned by 10% of survey respondents (35/352). They noted that this led to their (or other's) bins overflowing or, in some cases, they noted that they would instead:
 - Take rubbish to public or workplace bins (7/352 responses)
 - Dispose of rubbish in recycling bins (1/352 responses)



- Make trips to the tip (2/352 responses)
- Store waste in their garage or similar area for later collections (10/352 responses).

We religiously utilise soft plastic recycling at Woolworths, normal recycling for appropriate items, food waste green bin, glass recycling; and STILL we find it is not possible to fit our general waste in for a fortnightly collection. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

This feedback is supported by evidence from the bin audits and inspections, which showed over half of rubbish bins were being presented full and around 2-10% being regularly 'overfull' (see Section 5.4).

- Some of the related points here included the challenge of managing waste:
 - After events or parties
 - With young children who are in nappies
 - If fortnightly collections are accidentally missed or missed because people are away
 - From home renovations or other activities that create an unusual spike in waste.

As a family of 5 we have struggled to keep to this restriction, particularly when we entertain. This also limits our ability to throw away larger items. It would help if you increased hard rubbish collection limits. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- A key gap here appears to be in people's understanding (and/or willingness) of the option to upsize their bin to suit their needs. Of the 35 respondents who mentioned not having enough room for their waste:
 - The vast majority (22/35) had either the standard 120 L bin or even smaller 80 L bins (10/35). **Only two out of the 35 had opted for the larger 240 L bin and only one for 360 L of capacity.**
 - While some mentioned they were doing everything they could to reduce waste, several others explicitly mentioned that they were not using the FOGO bin because of concerns over smell and hygiene.

As a household with 4 adults, it simply isn't enough. Our bin is usually full by the end of the first week, and we have been forced to take extra rubbish to work or to the tip. We recycle religiously. With regard to the green bin however, we use it where we can but refuse to use it for everyday food waste as we are not allowed to use plastic bags. Putting food waste, unbagged, in the green bins, is unhygienic, smelly and dangerous. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- **Concerns over smell and hygiene were the most commonly mentioned issue among survey responses (15% of responses; 53/352).** This related to two different aspects of waste disposal:
 - **Some respondents were concerned about the smell of their rubbish bin when left for the extra week.** This included smells from nappies and animal faeces, but also from food scraps that people were reluctant to put into their FOGO bin.

As a small household we can manage fortnightly rubbish collection. At the moment the issue is the constant smell of the rubbish sitting in the bin for 2 weeks as our son is in nappies. Constantly cleaning and spraying the bin but the nappy smell is always there, heading into summer will only get worse. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- **Alternatively, some people were concerned about the smell and cleanliness of the FOGO bin itself, including the potential to attract pests.** Not being able to put food waste into

Merri-bek fortnightly rubbish trial – Evaluation report

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compostable bags was a key part of this and it seems to be one of the main reasons people give for not using their FOGO to its full extent. While some interviewees and a small number of survey respondent discussed alternatives such as using paper bags and freezing food waste, it was clear that these options or solutions were not widely known or practiced.

We kept on running out of space. Not allowing for compost/organic material to be put into bags meant it was a choice of either not using the green bin, or having the green bin get very smelly and dirty. (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- It is also important to note that while overall there was a mix of positive and negative views about fortnightly rubbish collections (see Figure 18), **some of the feedback from survey respondents conveyed very high levels of dissatisfaction and frustration** with the change. This was typically linked to the key issues of cleanliness and capacity above, as well as a more general dissatisfaction with council services and the perception that they were ‘paying more for less’.
- **While renters were able to choose their bins through the initial allocation, several interviewees and survey respondents noted that** the power dynamic between renters and landlords meant that some avoided changing their bin size, while others had their requests refused.

We are renting and have asked our landlord to increase our bin size but it has not been approved so we are drowning in dirty nappies and rubbish and it's affecting my mental health as a mother of 2 young children.¹² (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- **Businesses face a number of unique barriers and hoped for more tailored services and support.** Interviewed businesses noted that the nature and volume of their waste was different to residential properties and that they had to increase private collection frequency to deal with the longer collection cycle.
- **One challenge, which is expected to be temporary, is the disruption of routine and confusion about when bins are collected.** While this was mostly seen to be a minor inconvenience, missed collections exacerbated the challenges some households had with a lack volume. In this context, the SMS service, with 373 subscribers as of December 2025, was cited as a key resource that helped people to adapt to fortnightly collections (see also Section 8.1).

¹² Noting that this respondent could access a concession for a larger bin without landlord permission if they have two children in nappies.



The challenge of cleanliness, not just capacity - Family in Hadfield

Bin capacity is not the biggest concern for some in the community. For many, the issues of odour and hygiene were raised as more significant challenges when moving to fortnightly rubbish collections. This was the case for a family in Hadfield, with two young children. For this household and many of their immediate neighbours, the core issue is nappies and food waste creating pungent odours over summer. With an eight month old and a toddler, disposable nappies rapidly fill the red bin, which then sits near the back door “cooking” in the sun for up to two weeks, creating what he sees as a genuine hygiene and health risk for his children.

“The problem is the majority of the families here all have kids ... it seems to be the problem here is the nappies and the safety issue”

The family have increased their composting of food scraps and use of the glass bin and recycle but noted that nappies still made it challenging to fit all their rubbish into their available bin. After contacting Council, this family received a concession for a larger bin at no extra cost, helping them to manage the change to fortnightly collection. However, their concern over the smell and cleanliness of having rubbish bins collected fortnightly still remains a major concern.

“I have a bigger bin now because of the nappies ... if I didn't have that larger bin, then that would be a disaster for me. But because of the nappies, it's not hygienic. ... and even though the nappies are wrapped, you can't control it the smell.”

This highlights both the importance of having larger bins available for households with high waste needs, as well as the need for broader support and awareness raising from council about how smells and cleanliness issues can be managed.

(Based on interview with Trial participant, November 2025)



7 Cost implications

7.1 Bin size choices and the uptake of concessions

As part of the Trial, the standard bin size for households increased from 80 L to 120 L. While this was the default, prior to the start of the Trial residents were asked whether they would like a standard bin or an alternative smaller or larger bin (Table 2). Residents were also provided the opportunity to change their bin throughout the Trial period.

- Across the six month trial period, **134 (4%) households changed their bins**. Approximately 40% of these changes occurred before the fortnightly collection began.
- **The vast majority (85%) retained the standard size 120 L bin** for at least the first six months of the Trial (i.e. to December 2025).
- **Most requests to change were for bigger bins** - 70% of requests in Brunswick / Brunswick West and 85% of requests in Hadfield. A relatively high proportion of these upsized changes were made with the use of concessions – almost half (47%) of the 240 L bin changes were made using concessions.
- **138 concessions were provided to trial participants**, providing access to a bin size increase at no extra cost. Concessions for nappy users was the most common, followed by financial hardship concessions (Figure 21). As discussed in Section 8.1, feedback from participants indicates that concessions proved to be useful in terms of helping participants adjust to fortnightly collections. The leniency and discretion applied to the concession process also helped to remove barriers to obtaining those concessions (i.e. for the purposes of the Trial, MCC did not require the same level of evidence as what might be required under a municipal-wide roll-out).

Table 2. Bin size options and costs.

Bin size options	Cost for Trial participants	Comparative cost (non-Trial areas)	Number of bins (Dec 2025)	Proportion of bins (Dec 2025)	Proportion with concession
80 L	\$102	\$166	145	5%	0%
120 L (standard size)	\$136	\$374	2553	85%	0%
240 L	\$305	\$582	207	7%	47%
360 L	\$474	Not available	21	0.7%	71%
Shared waste			82	3%	
Total			3008		



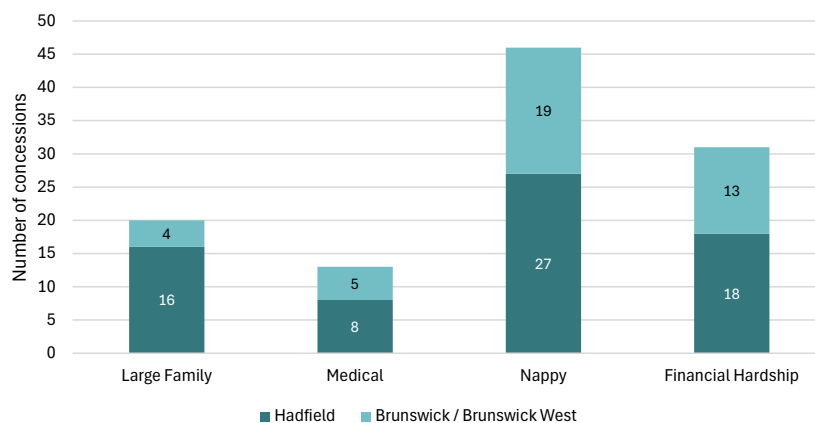


Figure 21. Concessions provided throughout the Trial.¹³

7.2 Overall costs for Council and residents

Modelling done as part of the Trial and future planning show that a transition to fortnightly rubbish collection would save council and its ratepayers in the order of \$16 million over 10 years, compared to maintaining weekly rubbish collections (Figure 22). Key factors considered in this modelling include estimated collection costs, disposal costs (including the State government waste levy), bin rollout, waste education, etc.

The modelling shows:

- **Transitioning to fortnightly collections will lead to a total savings of \$16.1 million over a 10-year period, or \$1.6 million per year.**
- **The rate of savings are expected to grow over time.** Fortnightly rubbish collection would see savings of around \$3 million per year in 2036/37 (\$36 million per year as compared to the cost of the status quo which is expected to be \$39 million the same year).
- Importantly, the current modelling provided to FPC at the time of writing used an assumed 40% diversion of food organics. **Audit data from the Trial (Section 5.1) shows a diversion rate of 56%. Under this scenario, savings would be expected to be greater - an average of \$2.1 million per year on the rubbish service cost. Furthermore, it is expected that food organics diversion would increase over time as residents adapt to the service change, leading to further potential cost savings.**

¹³ Based on Merri-bek tracking data for the Trial.



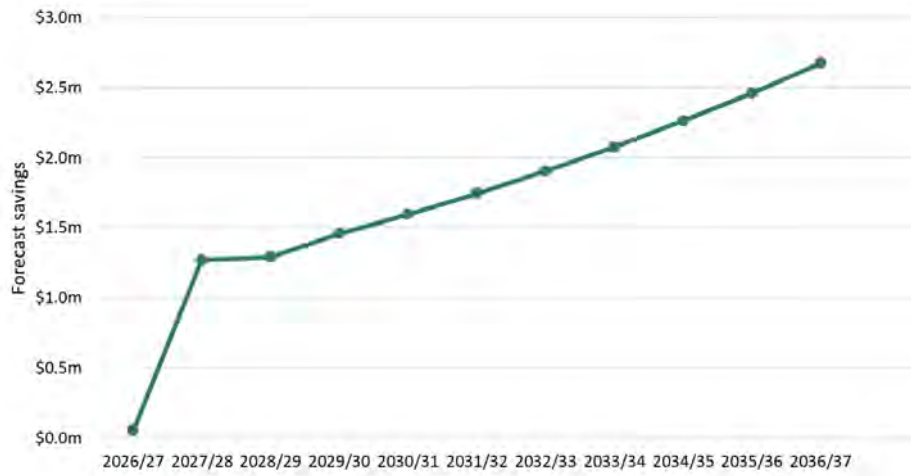


Figure 22. Modelled savings of fortnightly rubbish collection as compared to status quo. Assumes municipal-wide fortnightly rubbish collections in 2027/28 Data sourced from MCC.



8 Learnings around implementation

8.1 Efficacy of support mechanisms

Merri-bek City Council provided a suite of support to properties in the Trial area. Feedback from interviews and surveys indicate that this support was valued in a range of different contexts and to differing extents:

- Of the main elements of support offered by Council, **the general resources and information from Council were the most frequently cited as helpful** (Figure 23). Over a third of respondents (35%) indicated that these had helped them adjust to the fortnightly collection. Bin calendars, in particular, were highlighted by several interviewees and survey respondents as being particularly useful.

Remembering which bins to put out is hard - please budget to send the printed A5 calendars with magnet to all houses every year. Don't skimp!!! (Survey respondent – December 2025)

- **The SMS reminder service was also singled out in interviews and survey comments as being highly helpful.** 32% of survey respondents noted that the reminder was helpful, with several interviewees further elaborating how helpful and important they had been (see also the Box text below).

Each week, I get a text, telling me which colour bin. It's just brilliant. If they want this to succeed, they will get most people on board with that system, I think. (Community interview – December 2025).

- **Several interviewees and survey respondents specifically mentioned that having the option of a larger bin was critical to them being able to adapt to the fortnightly collection.** This is interesting in the context of the modest uptake of larger bins – as noted previously, only 8% of Trial households opted for a bin larger than the standard 120 L. Indeed, only 9% of the survey respondents that indicated their bin volume was inadequate (see Section 6.2) had upsized their bins. Key drivers here are likely to include households being:
 - unaware of the options related to bin changes
 - unwilling or unable to pay for the larger bin costs
 - unaware or ineligible for the concessions available (see below).

Some survey respondents clearly misinterpreted the costs associated with bin changes. One noted, for example, that upsizing their bin would cost them an additional \$400 in rates – something that is not possible under the Trial charges, even moving from the smallest to largest bin option.

- **Complementing the options for different bin sizes, having accessible concessions was a key piece of support** highlighted in both survey responses and interviews. These concessions provided eligible households with the opportunity to upsize their bin size at no extra cost, reducing the difficulty of dealing with the large amounts of waste created by, for example, young children in nappies, large households or people with medical needs. Important to the Trial, these concessions required minimal evidence at the time of application, further reducing the burden on participants. **The key issue to note here is that it appears that not all households were aware of the concessions available.** For example, 29 of the 36 survey respondents with 5 or more people in their households (potentially making them eligible for concessions) did not have larger bins (24% had only an 80 L bin). Similarly, some survey respondents highlighted the need for support for people with medical waste – something that is covered by the concession process.



- While 12% of survey respondents indicated that bin-tags were helpful reminders of what can go into bins, several respondents also indicated that they found these tags to be annoying and/or anxiety-inducing. That said, feedback from bin inspectors also revealed instances where the tags had directly helped people to recycle more appropriately. As noted by one interviewee:

A gentleman was on the street while I was doing the bin audits and he came up to me, to say he was putting the wrong milk packs in the recycling and how he saw the tag explaining they're not allowed in recycling, and he no longer puts them in, he was very excited to tell me. (Stakeholder interview – December 2025)

- Interviewees and survey respondents also provided feedback about how the Trial had, more generally, helped them to use their FOGO bin better. This included key steps such as:
 - **The provision of FOGO caddies at Council’s service centres** (which staff also noted to be beneficial in terms of prompting discussions with households)
 - **The allowance of brown paper bags in FOGO** as an alternative to biodegradable plastic bags helped in conversations, however the use of this method was not widely known in the community.

Giving out the caddies at customer service gave the customer something positive to walk away with, some positive thinking. (Merri-bek staff interview – November 2025)

I was surprised by how easy it has been. The kitchen caddy has been the key (Survey respondent – December 2025)

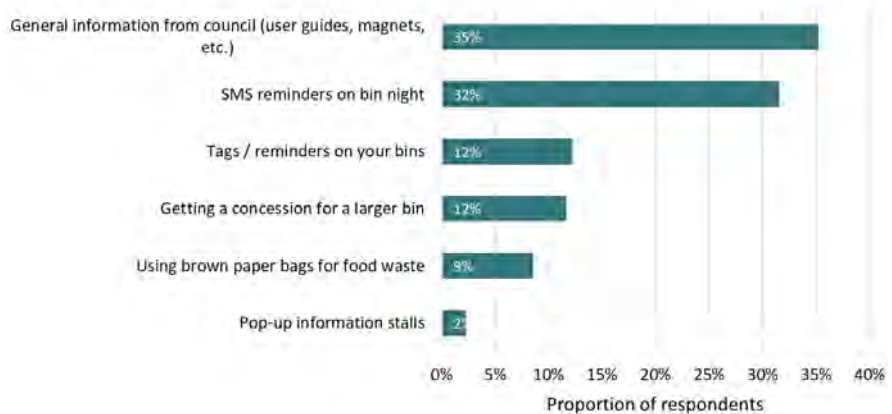


Figure 23. Proportion of survey respondents who found different support mechanisms useful. N=352.



Challenging but workable – the experience of a young family in Brunswick

A couple in Brunswick described feeling genuinely supportive of the change, seeing it as a practical way to reduce waste, which aligns with their environmental values. Before the birth of their first child, the system worked smoothly. Between composting at home and using the FOGO bin for food scraps, meat and bones, the red landfill bin was only ever about half full. However, everything changed once the baby arrived.

Overnight, the volume of waste the household produced increased drastically, with 8–12 disposable nappies a day quickly filling the red bin, even while they continued composting and using the FOGO bin as much as possible. Additionally, the small size of their bin was a challenge, with only 1 baby in a nappy, they were not eligible for a concession for a larger bin.

Despite struggling with adapting to the trial, the couple continue to support the fortnightly collection. Importantly, they also found some of the support from Council to be valuable - especially, the weekly SMS bin reminder as a way to help manage the change in routine.

“About a month or two ago, I signed up to the text updates. That is an absolute game changer. Like I really like cannot stress enough, I don’t know what the cost is to Council, but if you want to put it like bold and underline, that is sensational.”

(Based on interview with Trial participant, November 2025)

8.2 Key delivery lessons from a council perspective

Council staff’s experiences in delivering the fortnightly rubbish collection provided a range of insights for council in terms of what would be required for a council-wide roll-out. This includes:

- **The high levels of community inquiries and the associated need for appropriate resourcing of customer service.** The pre-trial period and early weeks of the Trial saw a spike in customer service inquiries related to the Trial and to waste management more generally (Figure 24). This then declined through time. For example, missed collections requests rose in the weeks immediately after the trial began, peaking at 62 requests in July and then declining over the trial period. The key point here is that the change to fortnightly collection led to a marked uptick in inquiries that would need to be accounted for if planning a municipal-wide roll-out; whether through increased resourcing or staged delivery.
- **The need for clarity and certainty in communications.** Staff reflected that there were a range of difficult conversations with community members during the early stages of planning for and delivery of the Trial at a point when the exact costs for ratepayers and the length of the Trial itself were unknown. This uncertainty was noted to create additional dissatisfaction among community members. While specific to the Trial, this provides a more general lesson around the importance of reducing ambiguity as much and as early as possible where significant changes are being implemented.
- **Sequencing bin-changes so that they are manageable.** The Trial adopted a highly flexible approach to bin changes, allowing residents to change their bins at any stage of the Trial process. This is not expected to be feasible for any municipal-wide roll-out. Instead, staff suggested:



- Rather than asking residents at the start about their preferred bin size, communicating that the 120 L bin will be the default unless people apply for something different.
- Adopting a clearer set of windows during which changes to bins can occur (rather than having the option of changing bins at any stage).
- **Establishing the viability of the SMS reminder service.** As noted above, this service was highly valued among Trial participants. However, it was highly manual and requires resourcing. If it is to be adopted across the municipality a more automated and cost-effective approach would be required.

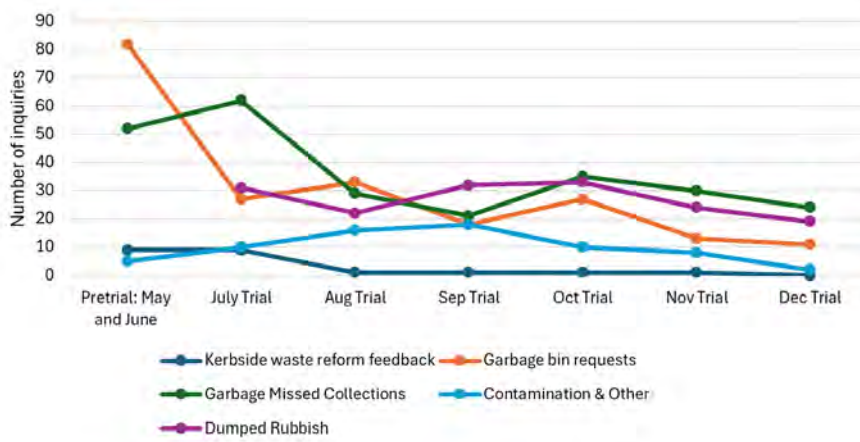


Figure 24. Customer service inquiries related to the Trial over time.



9 Appendix A – Variation in contributions to food waste in rubbish

As discussed in Section 5.1, audit data showed households differ substantially from each other in terms of how much food waste they were disposing into rubbish bins. Before the Trial, households disposing more than two kilograms of food waste in the rubbish bin accounted for 87% of all of the food waste in the rubbish stream (Figure 25).

This highlights several important points:

- Fortnightly rubbish collections effectively shifts the behaviour of these households. As of December 2025, those in this highest disposal category (putting more than two kilograms of food waste into the rubbish) accounted for 47% of the food waste (compared to 87% of the food waste pre-Trial).
- Households already putting low amounts of food waste into the rubbish contribute minimally to the overall level of food waste in the rubbish stream – the bottom 50% of households (i.e. half of audited properties) account for only around 7% of all the food waste in the rubbish.
- These points combine to emphasise the value of providing communications and support to those households who are disposing of large volumes of food waste into the rubbish (rather than the ones who are already using the FOGO bin to a modest extent). They are by far the most significant contributors to organics in the rubbish stream.
- Even after the dramatic improvements in food waste disposal achieved through the shift to fortnightly rubbish collection, a substantial amount of food waste (43%) remains in the rubbish stream. This means there is still further opportunity for improvement here.

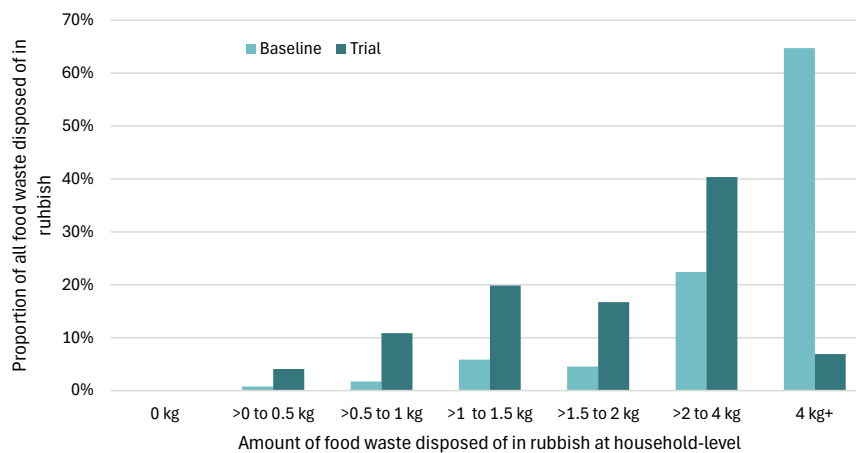


Figure 25. Proportion of all food waste disposed of in rubbish by households with different levels of disposal (note - data is only presented from single-unit dwellings to simplify interpretation; n=91). Data compared between June 2025 (pre-trial baseline) and December 2025 (Trial).



7.2 CENTRAL COBURG UPDATED FRAMEWORK PLAN AND SITE A1 EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST PROCESS

Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade

Central Coburg Program

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the updated Central Coburg framework (Attachment 1) and development standards (Attachment 2).
2. Notes how the feedback provided during the engagement has been reflected in the updated Central Coburg framework (Attachment 1) and informed the development standards (Attachment 2).
3. Publishes the updated Central Coburg framework (Attachment 1) and development standards (Attachment 2) Council's Conversations Merri-bek page.
4. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to make any minor refinements to the updated Central Coburg framework and development standards.
5. Receives a report in August 2026 with a business case for the Central Coburg precinct.
6. Commences an open Expression of Interest ('EOI') process to invite organisations with a local connection to put forward ideas for potential community uses they might develop and deliver on the southern portion of the Council-owned site at 28 Victoria Street, Coburg, with dimensions approximately 26.9m x 45.4m ('Site A1').
7. Following the EOI, receives a report confirming next steps for this site, including optimal uses, and a recommended shortlist (subject to suitable EOI(s) being received), that may progress to a potential Request for Information (RFI) process to submit proposals to purchase the site from Council and use it to deliver community services and outcomes.
8. In accordance with section 114 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, authorises public notice be posted on Council's website and feedback sought on Council's intention to sell the site to a successful respondent pending Council decisions on the EOI and RFI processes.

REPORT

Executive summary

Council has been working with the Merri-bek community for almost two decades to realise a vision for Central Coburg as a vibrant civic, cultural and economic heart. This vision has consistently focused on supporting local jobs and businesses, delivering diverse housing close to transport and services, creating high-quality community spaces, and establishing a green and inviting public realm.

Important foundations have been established to revitalise the precinct. The level crossing has been removed, the planning permit has been issued for the Coburg Health Hub to commence construction later this year, and Council has committed to a new library and piazza in the heart of Coburg for construction in 2028. Together, these developments create momentum for the full precinct to be delivered over the next decade.

In October 2025, Council endorsed the draft Central Coburg Framework ('Coburg is here') for community engagement. A comprehensive six-week engagement program was undertaken, including targeted engagement with key stakeholders, local traders and community groups. Feedback was received from a broad cross-section of the community and reported to Council in March 2026.

The updated Central Coburg Framework (Framework) presented in this report responds directly to that feedback. It includes design and built form refinements to reduce impacts on surrounding community assets, including increased setbacks and reduced scale for the building at the southern end of 28 Victoria Street, adjacent to the library and opposite the church precinct, and a desire to deliver community and creative uses to activate that site. It also includes further consideration of access, movement and car parking, as well as increased opportunities for affordable commercial and creative spaces within the precinct.

These updates strengthen the Framework and deliver on Council's long-standing objectives to:

- Create more jobs and a thriving economy in central Coburg.
- Deliver great design and built form with a vibrant, aesthetically appealing streetscape and identity for Coburg.
- Create beautiful and inviting new parks and open spaces for the community.
- Improve and redistribute public car parks, roads, and pedestrian access to make sure central Coburg is convenient and accessible.
- Provide diverse housing choices for families and other future Coburg residents, and contribute to closing Merri-bek's social housing gap.

This updated Framework represents a significant milestone in the revitalisation of Central Coburg. It reflects Council's commitment to listening to the community and refining its approach to achieve better outcomes.

Should Council endorse the updated Framework, the next phase of work will focus on developing a precinct business case, with further consideration of feasibility, staging and delivery arrangements. If the Framework is endorsed, Council will make progressive decisions about scope, funding, staging, procurement and delivery for each stage of the program. The immediate next decisions would relate to a precinct business case and procurement and delivery approach for a first stage of the program.

If this report recommendations are endorsed, officers will also release an open EOI seeking ideas from community organisations with an active presence in Coburg for the community services and benefit they could deliver if they purchased and developed the site known in the Framework as 'A1', in the Southern portion of 28 Victoria Street, Coburg. Pending outcomes from the EOI, Council would make a subsequent decision about scope, focus and a potential second Request for Information process leading to a sale. Controls are proposed on Site A1 which address community feedback.

Other decisions over the course of the next 12-18 months would potentially include endorsement a procurement approach and contract for the next stage of the Central Coburg program.

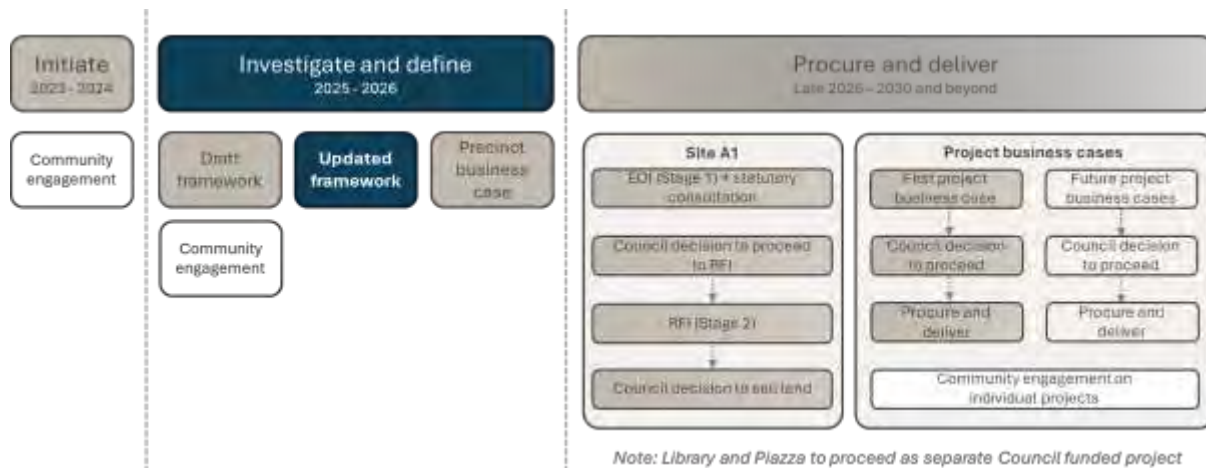


Figure 1: Central Coburg Program project lifecycle

Previous Council Decisions

The most recent and relevant Council decisions relating to Central Coburg are listed below:

- **Central Coburg Program community engagement summary** – 11 March 2026
- **Central Coburg Program property matters (Confidential)** – 11 March 2026
- **Central Coburg Program (Confidential)** – 8 October 2025
- **Central Coburg Program scenario modelling update (Confidential)** – 9 July 2025
- **Central Coburg Program scenario modelling update (Confidential)** – 14 May 2025
- **Coburg Library and Piazza Location** – 14 May 2025
- **Central Coburg Program – Scenarios for Further Investigation (Confidential)** – 12 March 2025
- **The Coburg Library and Piazza project** – 12 February 2025
- **Support for Central Coburg businesses and community** – 11 September 2024
- **The Coburg Conversation engagement findings and precinct objectives** – 10 April 2024.

These Council resolutions are contained in **Confidential Attachment 3**. Decisions not marked as confidential are available on Council’s website.

1. Policy Context

Council plan 2025-29

The updated Framework plan is consistent with a range of strategies and initiatives in the Council plan, including:

1. Care for nature and climate resilience
 - Cool urban environments and beautify public spaces with nature, including seeking opportunities to reduce hard surfaces to increase permeability.
 - Improve parks and facilities to make them welcoming places to share and to enjoy activities.
2. Healthy and inclusive communities
 - Support the housing and wellbeing needs of all in the community particularly those on lower incomes to have access housing in Merri-bek.

- Partner with government and housing providers to develop accessible, inclusive housing, including First Peoples, on Council land including in Central Coburg and other locations, as well as advocating for more public and community housing.
3. Beautiful and liveable city
 - Maintain our streets, laneways, and public places so they are adaptive to community needs; places we are proud of and feel safe in.
 - Make it easy and safe for people to move around Merri-bek, especially using public and active transport and zero emissions vehicles.
 4. Thriving economy and culture
 - Facilitate the further development of and investment into key commercial and industrial areas to attract investment and diverse job opportunities.
 - Nurture a vibrant arts culture by promoting diverse artistic activations and creating engaging experiences throughout the precincts right across Merri-bek, to celebrate creativity, attract visitors and reflect Merri-bek's unique culture and heritage. Champion the growth of performing arts spaces, advocate for artists' livelihoods, and promote diverse art forms to enrich the cultural landscape and empower the creative community in Merri-bek.

Council action plan 2025-26

Action 37: Progress plans and projects to revitalise and improve central Coburg.

Strategic Property Framework

The following objectives apply to disposal of Council property:

- To ensure that the disposal reflects Council's property principles.
- To ensure that all property disposals undertaken have confirmed the property is surplus to requirements and is not required for the delivery of an ongoing or future service delivery need, provided by or on behalf of Council.
- To ensure that any proposed property disposal demonstrates the highest value for money, considering direct financial benefits as well as broader community benefits as a result of the sale.
- To ensure that any proposed property disposal considers the proceeds from the sale, taking into account relevant legislative requirements.

Local Government Best Practice Guideline for the Sale, Exchange and Transfer of Land

The Victorian Government's 'Local Government Best Practice Guideline for the Sale, Exchange and Transfer of Land 2009' provides the below general principles for guidance:

1. *All sales, exchanges and transfers of land must comply with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1989.*
2. *Sales should be conducted through a public process (i.e. public auction, public tender or by registration of expressions of interest) unless circumstances exist that justify an alternative method of sale, for example the sale or exchange of land by private treaty. A council should explain to its community the circumstances which led to its decision to use an alternative method of sale in the interests of probity, public accountability and transparency.*
3. *Sales, exchanges and transfers of land should be in the best interests of the community and provide the best result, both financial and non-financial, for the council and the community.*

4. *Generally, all sales and exchanges of land should occur at not less than the market value assessed by a valuer engaged by the council. However, in the event that land is sold for less than the market value or exchanged for land of a lesser value, the council should explain the circumstances, reasons or factors which led to the decision to accept a sale price that is less than market value or land on exchange with a lower value.*
5. *Prior to being offered for sale, property should be appropriately zoned. This will ensure that the ultimate use of the land is determined by that zone and the highest possible sale price is achieved.*

2. Background

The Central Coburg program sites

Six Council-owned sites (approximately 4.5 hectares excluding streets and parks) form the basis of the updated Central Coburg framework plan, together with the adjoining streets of Waterfield Street, Victoria Street, Victoria Street Mall, Louisa Street, and Russell Street.



Figure 2: The six sites of the Central Coburg Program



Figure 3: Buildings, greening, and streets and laneways in the updated Framework plan

Place context

Central Coburg is a vibrant and diverse neighbourhood with a strong local identity, popular shopping strips, and excellent access to public transport. The area includes important community and recreational assets such as the Coburg Library, Leisure Centre, churches, health services, education facilities, creative spaces and sporting infrastructure.

At the same time, Central Coburg faces a range of challenges and opportunities for improvement. Parts of the public realm are ageing and fragmented, with extensive surface car parking, limited tree canopy and green space, and poor connections between key civic and community destinations. Central Coburg also has limited housing diversity and affordability, while the diversity of retail and commercial offerings could be improved.

Together, these factors present an opportunity to revitalise Central Coburg as a more vibrant economic, cultural and community-centred hub, with more housing, green space, transport connections and retail options.



Figure 4: Central Coburg context map

Strategic and planning policy context

Central Coburg is identified as a key activity centre within Melbourne's north, with strong access to jobs, services, public transport and community infrastructure. Located approximately 8 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD and serviced by both the Upfield train line and major tram and bus connections, Central Coburg is well positioned to accommodate additional housing, jobs and community activity in a highly accessible location.

In March 2026, the State government gazetted new Activity Centre zoning for the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres. It includes increased building heights in areas closest to Coburg Station – with heights up to 20 storeys permitted. These complement the existing concentration of services, transport connections and amenities around Coburg Station and the Pentridge precinct. A lower scale outer catchment area has also been identified within a comfortable walking distance of Coburg and Batman stations.

The Central Coburg program will deliver around 1,000 new dwellings, and includes heights ranging from four to eighteen storeys across the precinct. If it were developed to its full capacity it is likely that this number would double or triple. However the proposed development seeks to balance new housing with great design and liveability outcomes, and to retain Coburg's unique character. The Framework's building heights and built form outcomes have been informed by considerations such as overshadowing, wind impacts, interfaces with surrounding uses, access and parking requirements, and development feasibility.



Figure 5: Central Coburg maximum building heights in the State Government Activity Centres Program

What we heard

Throughout the engagement program Council heard a wide range of views that both aligned with and diverged from the draft concept. As outlined in the March engagement summary report, across the range of feedback channels, there was general support for key outcomes including:

- A greener, livelier, cleaner precinct with a diversity of retail
- Ensuring new buildings and urban design meet high quality standards
- Spaces for community organisations and artists in the precinct
- The new library and piazza, and
- Continued engagement with impacted stakeholders including local businesses and adjacent property owners.

There were also areas where there were more divergent views, particularly in relation to:

- the provision, design and management of traffic and car parking, and
- the amount and type of new housing.

The engagement program has helped Council confirm the careful balance of issues that are important for the community, in the updated Framework.

What we investigated

After consideration of community feedback, further work was undertaken including:

- Ongoing engagement with highly impacted stakeholders
- Reviewing the approach to public parking provision and distribution, including the potential to rebalance public car parking into the central Waterfield West site

- Reviewing the provision of commercial, retail and community spaces to diversify retail (including affordable business and creative spaces) and create affordable spaces for a vibrant community
- Developing design standards to ensure high quality design outcomes
- Responding to feedback about sympathetic built form adjacent to the church precinct along Victoria Street
- Identifying a preferred bicycle corridor and locations for bicycle parking
- Exploring opportunities for increased greening in the precinct
- Further thinking on the layout of the streets and managing traffic impacts
- Further testing of the mix of social, affordable and market housing
- Planning of construction and staging to minimise impacts on neighbours, and
- Ongoing testing and refinement of building heights, car parking provision and feasibility.

Investigations to optimise the bitumen car park in Waterfield Street ahead of construction commencing on the new library and piazza have commenced. To accommodate library construction and delivery, it is likely that the former Bi-Lo building will be demolished.

Project context

The updated Framework is a significant milestone for the Central Coburg Program. It establishes a shared vision for Council-owned sites and surrounding streets in central Coburg, setting out the mix of uses, the scale of development, how parking will be managed, the inclusion of social and affordable housing, the provision of open space, and how delivery may be staged over time.

The updated Framework sets a clear direction, but is designed to be adaptable. It provides a pathway for the precinct's future rather than a fixed blueprint, and will need to respond to changing circumstances over time.

The next step in the program is the development of a precinct-wide business case and delivery and procurement strategy. This will build on the updated Framework by further testing the best way to realise the vision of the updated Framework, refining the approach to funding and delivery, and working through how and when different parts of the precinct can be brought forward. The business case will give Council a clearer picture of its options before any major decisions on investment or procurement are made.

Accompanying the updated Framework are draft Central Coburg Development Standards, which provide clear guidance on buildings, streets, and open spaces to support its implementation. These will shape any future development, and sit alongside the Merri-bek Planning Scheme which sets the planning controls for assessing future development applications.

3. Issues

Updated Framework outcomes

The key outcomes of the updated Framework are organised around the six themes of the community engagement. These are:

- Coburg is community: a community gathering place where the library, piazza and Victoria Street Mall will form the heart of central Coburg.
- Coburg is thriving: a bustling place where diverse businesses will complement each other and create new life and energy.

- Coburg is accessible: an accessible place where people will comfortably walk, cycle, catch public transport or drive and park their car.
- Coburg is home: a family-friendly place to live where jobs, shops, public transport, public spaces, schools and community facilities are all nearby.
- Coburg is open: an open place where streets and parks provide comfortable, shady spaces for the community to connect.
- Changes in response to community and stakeholder engagement

The updated Framework includes a series of specific changes that respond directly to feedback received during community and stakeholder engagement. These have been worked through carefully balancing their impact on overall feasibility and the vision for the precinct. They are stepped out in the map and commentary below.



Figure 6: Location of changes in response to community engagement

1. More sensitive built form response

The scale of development opposite the Presentation of Our Lord was a key concern for many community members. In response, the Framework has been updated to:

- Reduce the maximum building height to six storeys.
- Introduce an overshadowing control.
- Increase the minimum ground floor setback to 8 metres.

2. Additional community and affordable commercial and creative spaces

Community feedback indicated the importance of more affordable and accessible community spaces, including for non-profits, arts and creative uses. In response, the Framework has been updated to:

- Introduce affordable commercial and creative uses within ground floor spaces, including within the ground floor of the car parking structure on Louisa Street.

- Nominate a site along Victoria Street that was previously proposed for housing to be slated for mixed community uses. Council is proposing to run an Expression of Interest process to confirm this model and to determine a suitable community-focused developer and operator.

3. More convenient parking

Through the engagement we heard that convenient and well-located parking is important to support local businesses and community anchors, and particularly to ensure there is sufficient public parking close to the commercial precinct in Waterfield West. In response, the Framework has been updated to:

- Rebalance public parking to increase provision on Site A, located close to Victoria Street Mall, Coburg Station, key community destinations and the proposed supermarket.

4. Easier and more adaptable car parking design

There were a range of concerns about the usability and long-term adaptability of multi-deck car parks. In response, the Framework has been updated to:

- Reduce the height of the Louisa Street car park from seven to five storeys.
- Adopt flat floor plates to improve accessibility, safety and future adaptability.
- Identify an opportunity for potential future development above the car park as a longer-term aspiration.

5. Improved intersection performance and safety

A range of concerns were raised about potential traffic congestion and network performance. In response, the Framework has been updated to:

- Identify a series of potential intersection upgrades to improve safety, capacity and functionality of the surrounding road network.

6. Clearer and safer cycling connections

Many community members said that cycling routes through the precinct were not clearly defined. In response, the Framework has been updated to clearly note future cycling routes including:

- A shared cycling path connecting Coburg Station to Russell Street.
- Bicycle parking at key destinations.
- Improved clarity and legibility of cycling connections throughout the precinct.

7. Safer and more inviting central streets

We heard that the community wants safer, greener and more people-friendly streets. In response, the Framework has been updated to:

- Upgrade key streets with higher quality materials and surface treatments to improve safety, comfort and amenity, and to slow vehicle speeds.

Other improvements

Other significant improvements include:

- High quality design outcomes: the Framework now includes development standards to guide minimum requirements and aspirational outcomes for buildings and public realm.
- Clarity of outcomes: the Framework has been updated with improved graphics and clearer communication of proposed outcomes.
- Construction impacts: development standards now include requirements for construction management plans to minimise impacts on the community.

A site to deliver more community outcomes

As noted above, Council is considering changing the use of the site to the west of the Library (known as Site A1, see *Figure 6*) in response to community feedback. This includes some changes to the built form on the site to better connect with neighbouring church precinct. It also includes a significant change to its proposed use – to become an activated site delivering a broad range of community uses and not-for-profit spaces in central Coburg.

In terms of built form, the updated Framework:

- Increases the minimum setback of the building from Victoria Street to 8 metres.
- Reduces the maximum building height by two storeys, to 6 storeys.
- Introduces an overshadowing control in the development standards.
- Changes the use of the building to community mixed-use (from residential). This change allows flexibility for a breadth of potential uses.

As part of the Library and Piazza project, Council is also working with the designer to consider the shape of the building's footprint can be refined to accommodate a small setback from Victoria Street. Together, these changes address feedback from the Presentation of our Lord community and create significant space for space for formal and informal gathering around the church precinct, and create options to utilise Library and Piazza spaces during key events.

The second and more material change is to re-imagine the use of site A1. This site was previously proposed as an all-residential building. Following extensive community feedback about the need for more community, affordable and arts spaces, it is proposed that this site becomes a community mixed-use building. This consolidates the community-focused heart in central Coburg, together with the two churches and the new library and piazza.

Council does not have the resources to deliver a community precinct beyond the proposed library. Council will look to the community sector (through the proposed open EOI process) for a vision, resources and delivery capacity for the community mixed-use building. This could include traditional community services as well as more affordable commercial and arts spaces. Feasibility work indicates that the land value must be returned to Council for the Central Coburg Program to remain feasible for Council. It is proposed that Council seeks proposals from community organisations with demonstrated community benefit objectives, strong operational capability, and an existing or meaningful connection to the Coburg community and surrounding catchment. A two-stage process is proposed as set out below:

Stage One – Open call for Expressions of Interest (EOI)

An open EOI would invite community organisations to share their high-level vision for the future of the site.

- An EOI is a light touch way for organisations to share their vision with Council, without requiring very detailed proposals that would come in a later stage.
- EOIs could be submitted by single organisations or partnerships – provided they outline clear capacity and capability to deliver.
- In parallel with the EOI, Council would undertake statutory consultation with the community about the potential sale of the land, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2020 and Council's own Community Engagement Policy.
- The outcomes of the EOI and the consultation would be presented to Council with a recommendation on whether to proceed with the process.

It is assumed that market value must be achieved in order for the site to be sold. This reflects the very tight feasibility for Central Coburg overall. If the site is not sold for market value, other outcomes that add cost to the program (such as a portion of social and affordable housing, or affordable commercial and arts offerings), would need to be reduced.

The proposals would be assessed against the below criteria:

Category	Criteria	Assessment
Vision	Outline the vision for the services and site	Compelling vision for the community services and impact for the new building and its connection to the local community. (Scored)
Viability	Demonstrate capacity to deliver	Strength of community-led organisation and locally connected. Strength of funding concept. Evidence of sufficient funds or ability to secure necessary funding to purchase and develop the land and deliver the services. (Scored)
	Organisation is a viable going concern	Demonstrate the organisation is financially stable and able to continue operating into the foreseeable future (Pass/Fail)
Value	Purchase price must reflect current market value for the site	Offers that do not reflect the market will not be considered. (Pass/Fail)

A report would be presented to Council following Stage One for decision on whether to proceed to the next stage with an endorsed shortlist of select proposals.

Stage two – Request for Further Information (RFI)

Subject to Council's decision on the EOI, a second stage would be a Request for Further Information (RFI), inviting a shortlist of respondents to provide a much more detailed proposal to meet a more detailed specification.

This would be evaluated carefully against four key criteria.

Category	Criteria	Assessment
Commerciality	Acceptability of any departures/ variations to transaction documents	Any requested departures/ variations to key terms are reasonable in light of the individual proposal and do not leave Council open to significant risk.
Capacity	Demonstrate capacity to deliver	Strength of proposed delivery model (including any partnerships) and potential timelines.
Concept	Demonstrate design excellence	Excellent design response to the site requirements and contributes to the precinct.
Community Benefit	Outline the community benefit and services proposed	Maximises community benefit/ impact of proposed community services and any other uses to activate the site.

Council will decide whether and how to proceed following the RFI process.

Council does not propose to directly develop or operate the building. A decision to proceed with the sale of land would occur only after completion of both procurement stages and required community engagement.

Feasibility

The draft framework was assessed as feasible, with a very limited margin. Updated feasibility modelling (**Confidential Attachment 4**) indicates that the updated Framework remains feasible, however, the overall position continues to be tight.

A number of changes since the draft framework have influenced feasibility. Positive impacts include:

- Some reduction in private commercial car parking provision to align with updated planning controls introduced by the State Government.
- Revision of utilities capacity cost estimates, as more information becomes available.
- Reduction in the height of the Site E multi-deck car park.

These have been offset by factors that place additional pressure on feasibility, including:

- The new Infrastructure Contributions Plan for Activity Centres introduce additional contributions to State infrastructure.
- The inclusion of more affordable commercial and creative spaces.
- Increased provision of public parking on Site A.

Other changes, such as the conversion of Site A1 to a community mixed-use building, are expected to be broadly neutral from a feasibility perspective, as the site is assumed to be transacted at market value.

It is important to note that feasibility is subject to change over time. The current modelling reflects a point-in-time assessment requiring assumptions about future market conditions, construction costs, financing environments and potential funding opportunities.

Further detailed testing will be undertaken through precinct and individual project business cases, which will provide certainty to prior to any future investment decisions.

Economic benefit

In total, almost 11,000 square metres will be dedicated to new retail, commercial and office space, providing opportunities for local businesses to grow and thrive, and creating a more vibrant, active central Coburg.

During construction, the project will deliver significant local benefits, generating around \$700 million in economic activity across Merri-bek and supporting approximately 265 local construction jobs each year.

Once complete, central Coburg will continue to contribute to the local economy, supporting around 300-350 ongoing jobs in new retail and commercial spaces. With around 2,000 new residents calling the area home, a further 50 jobs are expected to be created in the local community.

Social and Affordable Housing

There is a clear and growing need for social and affordable housing across Merri-bek. More than 4,300 households are currently in housing need, with approximately 84 per cent classified as low or very low income. Increasing access to secure, affordable housing is therefore a key priority.

The updated Framework maintains the social and affordable housing targets established in the draft Framework. This includes delivery of at least 90 social housing dwellings and an overall target of between 23 and 30 per cent social and affordable housing across the precinct.

Feedback from the social and affordable housing sector indicates that it would be more viable to deliver social and affordable housing in dedicated buildings, rather than mixing it with market housing within the same buildings. Dedicated buildings support ongoing building management and opportunities for service delivery for residents.

In response, the updated Framework proposes that social and affordable housing be delivered through two dedicated social and affordable housing buildings, alongside a requirement for all other residential buildings to provide 10 per cent affordable housing.

This approach maintains the maximum social and affordable housing target of 30 per cent while reducing the number of social and affordable buildings from three in the draft Framework to two in the updated Framework. It also improves the viability of achieving the higher end of the social and affordable housing target. The location of the two social and affordable housing buildings in the updated Framework is indicative and may change through the development of precinct and project business cases.

Achieving these outcomes will be subject to the availability of external funding, grants and delivery partnerships. While it is not yet clear whether there will be a further round of the federal Housing Australia Future Fund, given decades of ongoing programs facilitating social and affordable housing, future federal and state programs are likely.

These opportunities will be further explored through the precinct business case and subsequent project business cases.

Car parking

Parking plays an important role for many local businesses and visitors to central Coburg, particularly for those who find it more difficult to access the area by other modes of transport.

To support this, around 900 public car spaces will be re-provided, equating to approximately 80 per cent of existing supply. This approach is informed by expert transport advice which has considered current and future parking demand patterns.

All parts of central Coburg will be within a short, two-minute walk of public parking in three new multi-deck parking locations. The updated Framework proposes to introduce smart parking signage which directs people to available parking and reduces the number of people circling the precinct looking for a park.

On-street spaces will be prioritised for accessible parking, short-term stays, and loading, while off-street parking will cater to longer-term use, trader parking, and EV charging. In addition to publicly accessible car parking, new private parking will be provided for residents and businesses as part of future development.

Measures will also be put in place to mitigate the impacts of increased parking demand on existing residents and businesses in surrounding streets.

Traffic

Additional traffic modelling has been undertaken to inform the updated Framework (**Attachment 5**). The analysis indicates that the surrounding road network can accommodate the changes associated with the proposed development, with overall network performance expected to be broadly comparable to existing conditions.

It is recognised that traffic and congestion are key concerns for the community. The modelling provides confidence that these impacts can be effectively managed within the existing and proposed network. As with any development, more detailed modelling will be undertaken at each stage of decision making, as projects progress from concept through to delivery.

The updated Framework also identifies opportunities to improve how people move through central Coburg. This includes potential intersection upgrades to enhance safety and performance, as well as the rationalisation of vehicle crossovers to reduce conflicts between drivers, pedestrians and cyclists.

These intersection upgrades will be progressed in consultation with the State Government and subject to funding.

Together, these changes will support a safer, more accessible and better functioning transport network.

Development standards

The purpose of the Development Standards is to implement the updated Framework and create confidence and clarity for development partners, Council officers, design teams and the community. They provide clear and consistent requirements and guidance for buildings, streets and public spaces, ensuring development contributes to the long-term vision for Central Coburg.

The Development Standards are structured into three parts:

General standards provide overarching design principles and requirements that apply across all development sites and streets. These set expectations for context, built form, interfaces, land use, ESD, and public realm.

Public realm standards provide detailed design guidance for key public spaces, including streets, laneways, and open spaces, to support consistent, high-quality public realm outcomes across the precinct.

Site standards provide site-specific standards and minimum requirements to inform an integrated response to context, built form, interface design, land use, movement and access, ESD, and public realm.

Future development partners must demonstrate that their proposals meet the minimum requirements of the Design Standards and, where possible, respond to aspirational design outcomes.

Given the long term development horizon of the Framework, the Development Standards would be reviewed and refined (if required) prior to commencing procurement for any public realm or development project.

Staging and Site A interim works

The updated Framework is a long-term plan, with projects to be delivered in stages over 10-15 years. A staged approach improves the overall feasibility of the project and allows construction impacts, access arrangements and public car parking supply to be carefully managed over time. Public realm upgrades will also be coordinated with adjacent development to avoid rework and ensure infrastructure is delivered efficiently.

The updated Framework identifies six indicative stages of development. These stages are intended to guide sequencing and infrastructure planning but may change over time in response to factors such as market conditions, funding opportunities, delivery partnerships and project readiness. The precinct business case will further assess and refine the proposed staging approach.

While the overall program is long-term, the first stage (delivery of the library and piazza) is more certain. Council has committed funding for the new library and piazza, with construction anticipated to commence in 2028 and the new library expected to open in 2029.

To support construction and operation of the new library and piazza, interim works within Site A will be needed to create efficient access and egress and optimise the remaining car parking bays. This will help to minimise the impacts of the Library and Piazza construction on existing users.

These works will include reconfiguration of the Waterfield Street car park, with opportunities to improve functionality and retain a reasonable number of public car parking spaces on the site. Interim pedestrian connections between Coburg Station, Waterfield Street and Victoria Street Mall are also required. These works have been budgeted in Council's capital works program in 2027-28.

It is likely that both library construction and Site A works will impact the former Bi-Lo building.

Creative and community spaces – Schoolhouse Studios

Artist studios, maker spaces, social enterprises and other not for profits bring important life and identity to central Coburg. The updated Framework includes provision for community uses and affordable commercial space across two sites.

Schoolhouse Studios currently occupies the existing Bi-Lo building under a temporary lease arrangement with Coles at significantly discounted rent (less than ten per cent of market value). Schoolhouse have been operating a "meanwhile" model, activating underutilised buildings on a temporary basis and providing affordable studio spaces for artists and creatives.

The former Bi-Lo building will be demolished to deliver the Central Coburg Program. It is likely that this may need to occur to facilitate construction of the Library and Piazza, and interim car parking arrangements. Coles has recently advised Council that it will not extend its lease of the building from Council beyond August 2026.

As a result, Schoolhouse Studios' use of the building will come to an end.

Council values the contribution Schoolhouse Studios has made to central Coburg over the last five years. Council has offered to extend Schoolhouse's lease until June 2027 to support transition, and is working with the organisation to identify potential future locations.

Human Rights consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

The updated Framework is consistent with the right to take part in public life (section 18), which protects the right of people to participate in public affairs and contribute to decision-making processes on matters that affect them. A comprehensive community engagement program was undertaken following Council endorsement of the draft Framework in October 2025, including broad community engagement and targeted consultation with key stakeholders, local traders, community organisations and affected groups. This engagement informed a range of changes to the updated Framework and will continue through future stages of the project.

The updated Framework has also been assessed against cultural rights (section 19), which protect the right of people to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and maintain their cultural identity. The updated Framework seeks to recognise and respond to these considerations through design refinements, including reduced impacts on the Presentation of Our Lord.

Importantly, the Charter does not require that no impacts occur on relevant rights, but that impacts are reasonable, necessary, justified and proportionate. In this context, the updated Framework represents a balancing of multiple public interests, including improved public realm, housing delivery, economic activity, access and movement, and the protection and enhancement of community and cultural life.

Further to this, a Gender Equity Impact Assessment (GEIA) has also been prepared for the Central Coburg Program, which identified the following actions to be monitored:

- Continue targeted engagement with potentially underrepresented groups, particularly responding to potential effects of concept designs and project proposals as they are being planned.

- Embed First Nations cultural narratives and recognition into designs of new public spaces by using the Central Coburg First Nations Cultural Narratives Report and undertaking further consultation with Traditional Owners.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Updated Framework plan

An intensive community engagement program was undertaken to obtain feedback on the draft Central Coburg framework plan. It was held over a six-week engagement period, incorporating a mix of online and in-person activities to reach a wide audience. We engaged local residents, potential future residents, businesses, shoppers, workers, community organisations, and other key Council stakeholders. Ongoing targeted conversations with key stakeholders will ensure they play an active role throughout the process.

The engagement process also provided an opportunity to check in with the community to see whether feedback from the similarly intensive engagement on objectives for the site in 2023 is still consistent today. The engagement acknowledged previous engagement and was clear about scope for the next phase of the project. For example, the overall amount of housing is shaped by feasibility and is not open to significant change. However, there is greater scope for input on matters such as new parks, street upgrades, and how these public spaces can best serve local needs.

Engagement also explained the feasibility challenge and the need for trade-offs to balance different public benefit outcomes. It also outlined potential staging, timing and future work.

The findings of the engagement process were published in a Community Engagement Summary Report following the March 2026 Council meeting.

Further community consultation was also undertaken earlier this year on the concept designs for the new library and piazza and design revisions are underway following this consultation.

Further community consultation including meetings with impacted stakeholders will continue to support delivery of the program.

Site A1 EOI consultation and engagement

The proposed two stage EOI process to confirm a vision and identify a community organisation to purchase site A1 and deliver community services responds to a broad range of feedback received during community engagement on the draft Framework.

The *Local Government Act 2020* section 114 requires that before selling land, Council must:

- (a) *at least 4 weeks prior to dealing with the land, publish notice of intention to do so—*
 - i. *on the Council's Internet site; and*
 - ii. *in any other manner prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this subsection; and*
- (b) *undertake a community engagement process in accordance with its community engagement policy; and*
- (c) *obtain from a person who holds the qualifications or experience specified under section 13DA(2) of the Valuation of Land Act 1960 a valuation of the land which is made not more than 6 months prior to dealing with the land.*

If Council resolves to proceed, the above process regarding notice and community engagement could commence concurrently with the opening of the EOI process.

Community engagement would be undertaken in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Policy which specifies that for the sale of land, Council will typically provide engagement at the level of 'Consult or Involve' for the community.

In this case, Council would notify residents that it is proposing the sale of the Property to a successful EOI respondent and seek feedback to the proposal via Council's 'Conversations Merri-bek' page.

Affected persons rights and interests

The public engagement process has provided an opportunity for all community members to provide feedback on the draft framework plan.

Key stakeholder groups including Central Coburg Business Association, The Presentation of Our Lord and Schoolhouse Studios were also proactively consulted and Council will continue to consult as the project progresses.

Communications

Following the endorsement of the framework plan, a communications strategy will be delivered including social media, news updates and online publication of the documents. Key stakeholders have already been informed of the key elements of the framework plan and how their feedback has shaped the updated vision for Coburg.

5. Officer declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and resources implications

The officer recommendation does not have any significant immediate financial implications. Funding required to implement the recommendations of this report is included within the current and forward budgets for the Central Coburg Program.

Endorsement of the updated Framework does not commit Council to any specific development, land transaction or delivery approach. Any future decision to progress development identified in the Framework would be subject to further Council consideration, including the development of a precinct business case, delivery strategy and, where required, individual project business cases.

Any future decision relating to the sale or development of Site A1 would also be subject to a future Expressions of Interest process, further community engagement and additional Council decision-making.

7. Implementation

Subject to Council's decision to adopt the framework, the next steps will include

- Publishing the updated Framework and Development Standards on the conversations Merri-bek website and main Council website.
- Delivery of the communications plan
- Preparation of a precinct business case and delivery and procurement strategy, to be reported to Council in August 2026
- Commence an Expression of Interest process to identify and select a community organisation to purchase site A1 and to build and deliver community services.

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|---|--|------------|
| 1 | Updated Central Coburg framework | D26/244710 |
| 2 | Central Coburg Development Standards | D26/244709 |
| 3 | Previous Council decisions (Confidential)
<i>Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released.</i> | D26/244706 |
| 4 | Central Coburg Precinct Framework Feasibility Report (Confidential)
<i>Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released.</i> | D26/244704 |
| 5 | Traffic modelling summary | D26/244701 |



COBURG IS HERE

An updated framework for central Coburg

June 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Coburg. We are grateful for their care of this Country and for the ongoing contributions of all First Nations communities to present day Coburg.

Foreword



Central Coburg is a much-loved destination. This is true not only for locals, but for people across Merri-bek, Melbourne, and beyond. Known for its eclectic mix of cafes, shops, local businesses, creative communities, and cultural heart, central Coburg is a place where people feel connected and at home.

However, Coburg is changing. We have an opportunity to secure its future as a vibrant economic, cultural and community-centred hub, with more housing, community and arts spaces, green space, transport connections and retail options.

And an obligation to hold on to the history we love about Coburg too.

Council's vision for central Coburg builds on years of planning, with the framework building on extensive community engagement in 2023 and 2025. While consistent with the State's 2025 reforms which seek to deliver more housing in well-located centres, our plan is distinctly tailored to Coburg. Council's plan takes a broader view that also supports local jobs and economic diversity, and prioritising a balanced outcome that accommodates growth, delivers a range of building scales (between three and 18 storeys) and embeds generous green areas and public open space.

Our Precinct Framework sets out a plan for how we will address housing needs, provide more community services, facilities and green space, and enhance the economic viability of the area whilst retaining Coburg's unique character. Some of the highlights of this plan include:

- > A new \$60 million library and piazza
- > New office and retail spaces
- > Affordable commercial spaces for community organisations and artists
- > Six new green spaces, and around 200 new trees
- > Around 1,000 new housing options, featuring a mix of market, affordable and social housing
- > Greener and safer streets, with safer and greener active transport connections
- > Around 900 public car parks for those who need to drive

This plan has been shaped by extensive community consultation to ensure our plans reflect community aspirations for the future of central Coburg. I'd like to thank everyone who contributed their voice, ideas and feedback to help us refine our vision for this much-loved precinct.

The next step in this plan will be the construction of our new library and piazza, which is set to open its door to the community in 2029.

We all look forward to working with the community to bring this vision for a vibrant future for central coburg to life.

Nat Abboud,
Mayor, Merri-bek City Council

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Acknowledgement is given to the Australian Government’s Housing Support Program for its contribution to the funding of this project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- ❖ Delivering the vision
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- ❖ Key outcomes
- ❖ The six sites



Council acknowledges the work of our primary advisors: Bridge 42, SGS Economics and Planning, MGS Architects, GLAS Landscape Architects, Sibling Architecture, Traffix Group, Design Flow, Rain Consulting and Zinc Cost Management. First Nations Cultural Narratives prepared by Greenshoot Consulting. Visualisations prepared by Narrative.

View along Victoria Street Mall looking towards Sydney Road. Indicative visualisation by Narrative.

Vision

Central Coburg will be a welcoming and vibrant place for people to work, visit and live, full of parks and green spaces. As central Coburg changes over time, it will continually adapt to the needs of a growing community, while building on the unique character of Coburg.

A new inspiring library building will form the heart of Coburg, alongside a piazza that welcomes all to gather, play and rest. A new network of public spaces will be designed to support different activities and will play a vital role in managing water, restoring habitats and cooling the area.

More shops, businesses, cafes, restaurants, bars, services and a new supermarket will complement existing businesses and breathe new life into the area, creating activity day and night.

Around 1,000 new homes will allow people to live close to public transport, shops and services.

Safer streets full of trees will make walking and cycling more attractive options. For those who need to drive, public parking will be relocated into multi-deck car parks, designed to prioritise accessibility and safety while integrating greenery and other uses.

Delivering the vision

To deliver this vision for Coburg, a balance between the best community outcomes and financial feasibility is critical. The proposals outlined in this framework plan are financially feasible, but only by a fine margin. Feasibility can change with market conditions, construction costs and interest rates. Council will also explore State and Commonwealth funding opportunities to further support the delivery of the framework plan.

Framework Plan and Development Standards

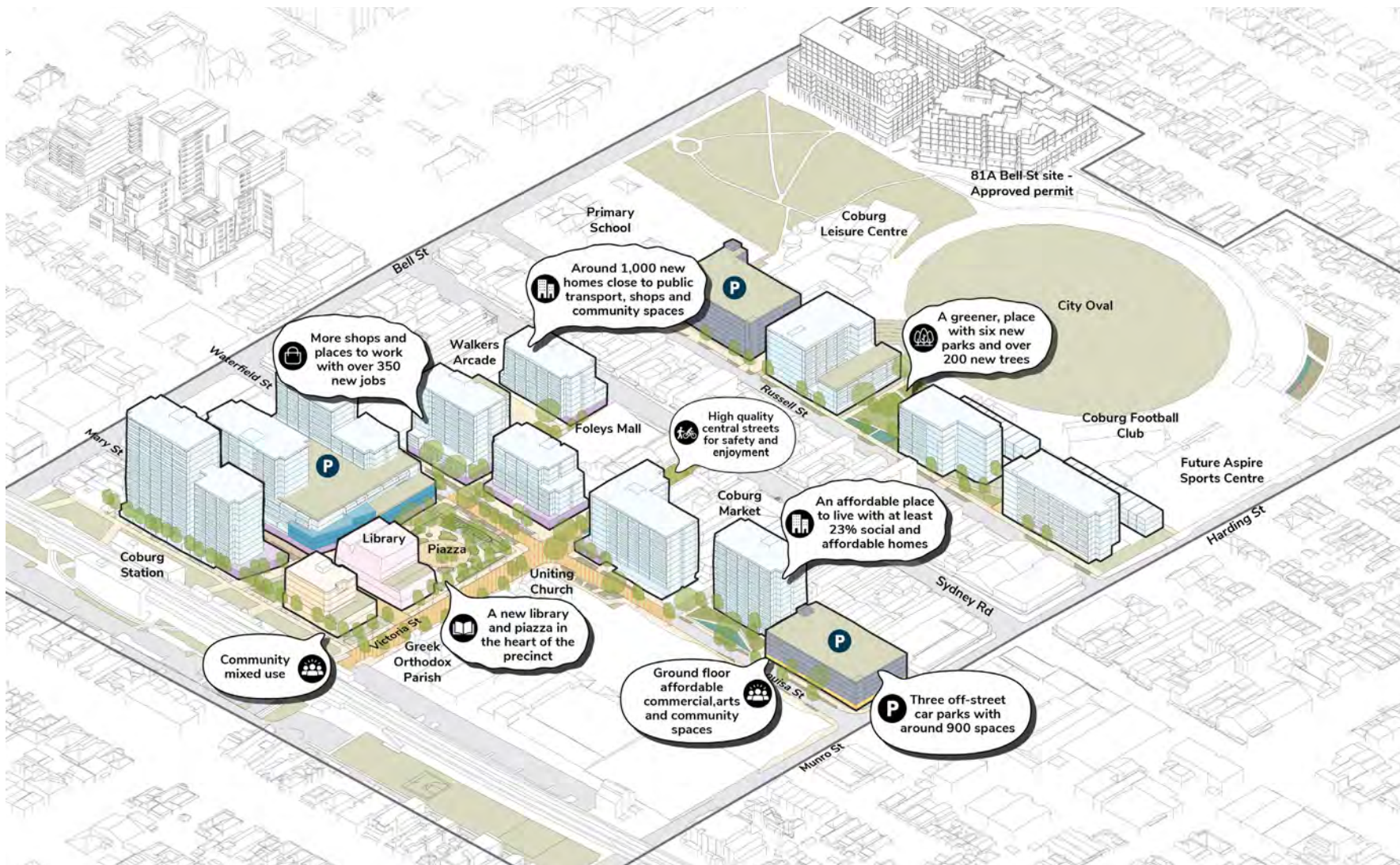
The updated framework plan sets the vision and aspirations for Council sites and surrounding streets in central Coburg. It outlines the uses and scale of the sites, and how we will manage parking, include social and affordable housing, provide open space, and stage development. Accompanying the framework plan are the Central Coburg Development Standards, which provide clear guidance on buildings, streets, and open spaces to support its implementation. The Merri-bek Planning Scheme provides the planning controls for assessing development applications.



Central Coburg Precinct Framework



Central Coburg Development Standards



An updated framework for central Coburg. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

Community engagement

This framework plan responds to feedback received from two rounds of community and stakeholder engagement in 2023 and 2025. Over this time, we received over 2,500 pieces of community feedback.

The first round of engagement gathered the community's ideas and aspirations for central Coburg, which informed a carefully balanced draft plan. Responses to the draft were then collected in the second round of engagement which have helped us update the framework plan.

What we investigated

After listening to community and stakeholder feedback, we focused on making sure the updated framework plan reflects the ideas and concerns we heard. This included:

- > Ongoing engagement with highly impacted stakeholders
 - > Reviewing the approach to public parking provision and distribution, including the potential to rebalance public car parking into the central Waterfield West site
 - > Reviewing the provision of commercial, retail and community spaces to diversify retail (including affordable business and creative spaces) and create affordable spaces for a vibrant community
 - > Developing design standards to ensure high quality design outcomes
- > Responding to feedback about sympathetic built form adjacent to the church precinct along Victoria Street
 - > Identifying a preferred bicycle corridor and locations for bicycle parking
 - > Exploring opportunities for increased greening in the precinct
 - > Further thinking on the layout of the streets and managing traffic impacts
 - > Further testing of the mix of social, affordable and market housing
 - > Planning of construction and staging to minimise impacts on neighbours, and
 - > Ongoing testing and refinement of building heights, car parking provision and feasibility.

After this refinement, we updated the framework. Table 1 provides an overview of the changes to the plan.

Table 1: Summary of changes to the framework plan

We heard that...	So we...
Community spaces for non-profits, artists and studio spaces should be included in central Coburg.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Included additional community spaces and affordable commercial spaces, including studios. > Propose a new community mixed-use site next to the new library.
Concerns about the impact on the Presentation of Our Lord.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reduced the height and increased the setback of the building nearest to the Presentation of Our Lord.
Preferred cycling routes and parking locations in central Coburg should be identified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Included a shared off-road cycling route on Station Walk to connect Coburg Station, Coburg Library and Piazza, and Sydney Road. > Identified locations for future bike parking hubs.
Local businesses and community services rely on nearby public parking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Relocated public carparks from the south of Louisa Street to the north of Waterfield Street, to increase the number of conveniently located carparks in the centre of Coburg.
Concerns about car parking buildings being difficult to use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Improved the design of the multi-deck car park on Site E including making the floor flat and improving accessibility.
Growing traffic congestion in the area is a concern.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Propose five key intersection improvements to improve efficiency and introduce smart parking signs to reduce the number of people circling the precinct looking for a carpark.
New buildings and urban design should be high quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Prepared Development Standards for central Coburg to guide the quality of future development.
Coburg needs more open space and greening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Introduced an aspirational target to reach 40 per cent canopy cover within new streets and public spaces. > Improved the designs for streets and introduced a new high-quality, slow and safe zone in the centre of Coburg.
Concerns about potential impacts during construction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Included a requirement to prepare a construction management plan in the development standards. > Will continue to work closely with local business and key stakeholders to ensure construction management plans consider community impacts. > Will optimise car park layouts during construction to maximise the number of spaces available.

Key outcomes

Our ambition is to deliver the community's aspirations and vision for central Coburg.



Coburg is Community

A community gathering place where the library, piazza and Victoria Street Mall will form the heart of central Coburg.

There will be a new \$60m library and piazza between Coburg Station and Victoria Street Mall. A new community mixed-use site on Victoria Street will consolidate a community-focussed heart in central Coburg, together with the two existing churches and new library and piazza. Local organisations and artists can access new affordable commercial spaces. Central Coburg will be better connected to the future Coburg health and community services precinct and Coburg Leisure Centre.



Coburg is Thriving

A bustling place where diverse businesses will complement each other and create new life and energy.

There will be over 10,000 square metres of new retail, office and community spaces located along key pedestrian streets. There will be a range of shapes and sizes for businesses. We propose new affordable commercial spaces to support local organisations, entrepreneurs and creatives. We want to keep the existing traders and add a broader offering, increasing evening trade.



Coburg is Home

A family-friendly place to live where jobs, shops, public transport, public spaces, schools, and community facilities are all nearby.

Around 1,000 new places to live including apartments that support families and larger households. This includes 23-30 per cent social and affordable housing (at least 90 social housing dwellings), with the range and delivery timing influenced by funding availability. Design standards will ensure homes are well designed and meet the needs of a diverse community.



Coburg is Open

An open place where streets and parks provide comfortable, shady spaces for the community to connect.

Six vibrant new public spaces and more than 200 new trees will transform central Coburg into a greener, more liveable neighbourhood. Every resident will be just a short 300m walk from a brand new public space, with at least 5 square metres of public open space per person. Key streets will be reimagined as safe, inviting places that bring people together and support everyday community life. Thoughtfully designed buildings will minimise wind and shadow impacts and an aspirational 40 per cent tree canopy cover target will help cool Central Coburg during heat events.



Coburg is Accessible

An accessible place where people will comfortably walk, cycle, catch public transport or drive and park their car.

Existing streets will be upgraded and new laneways will make it easier to move around. Around 900 existing public car parks will be relocated into three accessible locations within a two-minute walk to all parts of central Coburg. A new shared cycling path from Coburg Station through the precinct with plenty of bike parking at key destinations like the new library and piazza. Private buildings will ensure that there new residents have appropriate parking.

COBURG CONTEXT

- ❖ Coburg's identity
- ❖ Strategic context
- ❖ Designing for Country
- ❖ The existing sites



Victoria Street Mall. Photo by Simon Auber.

Coburg context

Coburg's identity

Coburg is a unique suburb with a bustling heart. Over generations of immigration, Coburg has become a centre for cultural exchange and a place where differences are celebrated.



Dunnes Lane. Photo by Simon Aubor.

A part of Wurundjeri Country, Coburg was historically a wetland and today remains ecologically rich with the important waterway Merri Creek to the east.

The diversity of Coburg's community is part of what makes the suburb so special. With over 30 per cent of Coburg's population born overseas, and more than 60 per cent of Coburg's population having one or both parents born overseas, the area has a rich cultural tapestry woven over a long history of immigration.

Gathering spaces like Victoria Street Mall are often full of people mingling, socialising and sharing meals. The two local churches allow the community to gather, connect and reflect, and the library, set to be updated in coming years, is also a hub of activity. There are many public artworks, murals, artist studios and workshop spaces across central Coburg, which reflect the area's artistic and creative spirit.

Its commercial heart, defined by Sydney Road and Victoria Street Mall, is celebrated for its diverse and multicultural food offerings, specialised retail, and lively community gathering spaces. Many businesses have been in the area for years, are much-loved by the community, and are woven into Coburg's cultural history.

Strategic context

Coburg is a well-connected, central place with strong services, amenities, and transport links, and we are planning and advocating for the change and investment needed to support its next stage of growth.

Coburg Activity Centre

In March 2026, the Victorian Government increased building heights throughout the Coburg Activity Centre as part of the Train and Tram Zone Activity Centres Program, with the highest heights applied closest to the Coburg Station.

A catchment area within a comfortable walking distance to the Coburg and Batman Stations has also been defined at a lower scale than the core activity centre

Victoria Street Mall upgrades

Council will soon begin upgrading Victoria Mall, Coburg, improving shop fronts, awnings and lighting, while providing traders with umbrellas and a dedicated outdoor performer and busking space to enhance this well-loved area. These works are funded by the State Government's Multicultural Business Precinct Revitalisation Program and delivered in partnership with the Central Coburg Business Association.

Streets for People

We adopted the Streets for People Plan in 2025 identifying key streets in the municipality for improvement projects. It identifies Munro/Harding Street as an important east west corridor for transport improvements and other street upgrades to support the delivery of this framework plan and Coburg health and community services precinct.

Public transport improvements

Duplication of the Upfield Line is a key advocacy priority for Council. Funding has been allocated in the 2026/27 State Government budget to develop a business case and development program. Duplication of the Upfield line is essential for providing access to central Coburg.

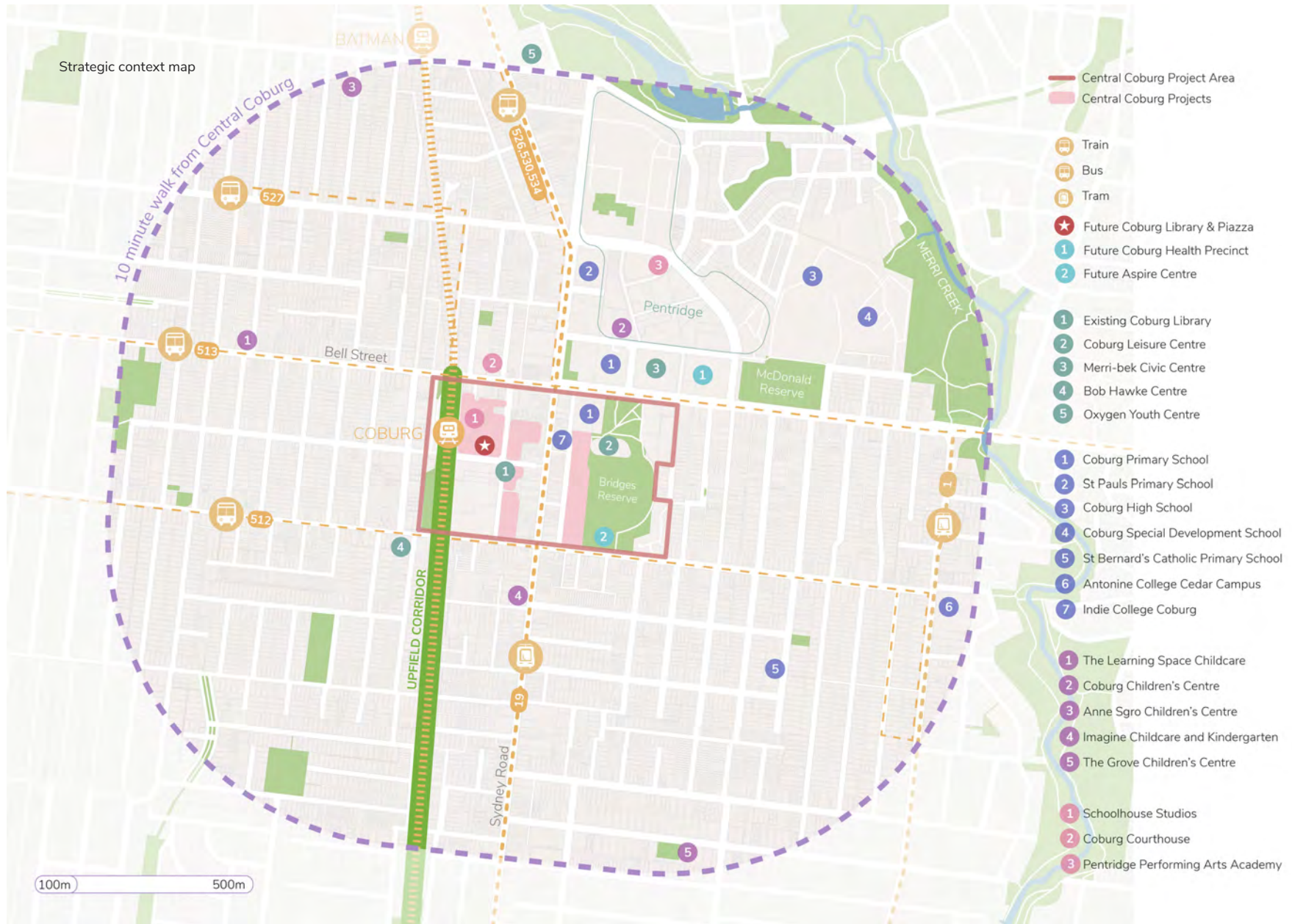
Accessible tram stops are another an advocacy priority for Council. In 2026, the State Government committed funding to the planning of level access tram stops along Sydney Road to support access to of our activity centres and local businesses.

Coburg health and community services precinct

The Coburg Health Precinct Masterplan was endorsed by Council in 2022. The plan will create a new health precinct responding to identified local gaps in key health and community services, including GPs, aged care, childcare, dental, and allied health services located next to the Merri-bek Civic Centre on Bell Street. The precinct will also include affordable housing. Work on the first stage is expected to begin this year.

Aspire Sports Centre

Council is supporting the Bachar Houli foundation to developing a new school and sports centre on Harding Street, Coburg. The 'Aspire Sports Centre' will be a multipurpose indoor facility combining sport, education and community use. It will provide more access to indoor courts in Coburg, helping address growing demand for basketball, futsal and other indoor sports across Merri-bek.



Designing for Country

Coburg used to have many wetlands, lagoons, rivers and creeks. Merri Creek, Edgars Creek and Merylnston Creek remain important waterways with strong cultural associations for First Nations people. Waterways have been important places of connection for social and ceremonial gatherings, trade, initiation, marriage, and lore business for tens of thousands of years.

The ambition for central Coburg is to embed First Nations cultural narratives into the design of streets, public spaces and buildings.

To achieve this, Council have worked with Wurundjeri Elders to record First Nations Cultural Narratives for central Coburg. The purpose of these cultural narratives is to allow those delivering projects in central Coburg to embed First Nations storytelling into the urban fabric.

This is about taking a Country-centred approach to design. It moves away from viewing projects through a human-focused hierarchy, towards recognising the interconnected relationship between people, water, plants, animals and sky. This approach encourages designs that respond to and respect Country, recognising that people are part of a broader living system.

There are six cultural narratives for central Coburg:

1. Honouring ancestral connections and creation stories.
2. Truth-telling, knowledge sharing and public understanding.
3. Supporting ceremony and cross-cultural exchange.
4. Contemporary representations of culture.
5. Cultural knowledge transfer and intergenerational learning.
6. Connecting to Country: ecological and cultural heritage.



Wurundjeri Country. Image by Greenshoot Consulting.

The existing sites

The six sites each have a unique character and set of qualities. This presents an opportunity to create distinct and exciting new places on every site, responding to the specific opportunities of each.

These sites were purchased over several decades with the ambition to deliver better outcomes for central Coburg. A long-term vision to transform the six sites was developed 15 years ago, but then paused. We are now ready to move forward with an updated vision.



Waterfield West (Site A)

Open air public car park next to Coburg Station. It is home to a former supermarket building, currently occupied by Schoolhouse Studios.



Waterfield East (Site B)

Coles supermarket and small businesses, fronting Sydney Road and accessible from Waterfield Street.



Victoria North (Site C)

Open air public car park fronting Victoria Street Mall and Waterfield Street.



Victoria South (Site D)

Home to the current Coburg Library which opened in 1983 after the renovation of an existing supermarket. The new library will be on the Waterfield West site.



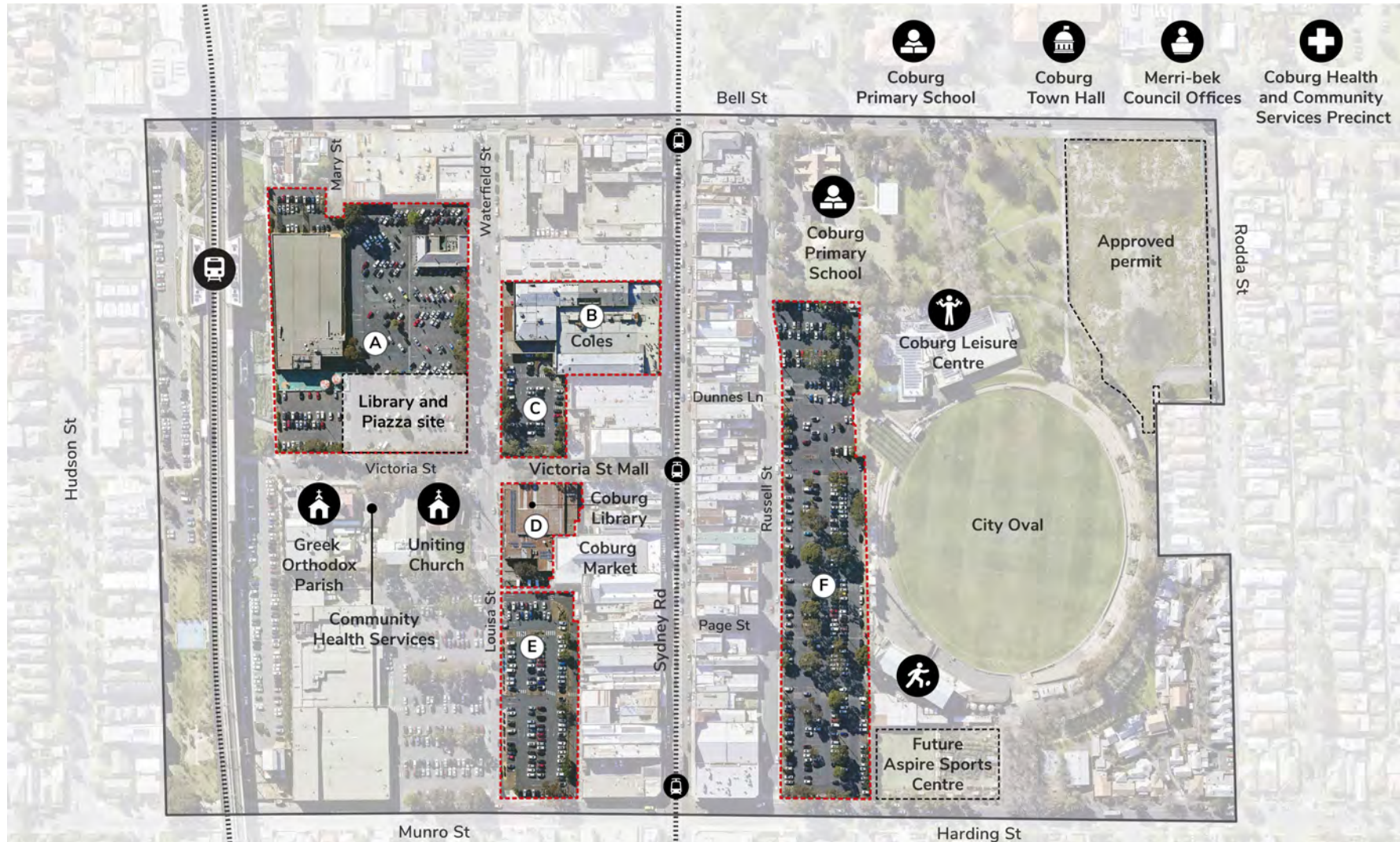
Louisa East (Site E)

Open air public car park that is directly behind the Coburg Library and Coburg Market. As well as car parks, there are trees and a small seating area on the site.



Russell East (Site F)

Open air public car park next to City Oval and the Coburg Leisure Centre. As well as car parks, there are trees, pathways and a public toilet on the site.



The existing sites, Image by MGS Architects.

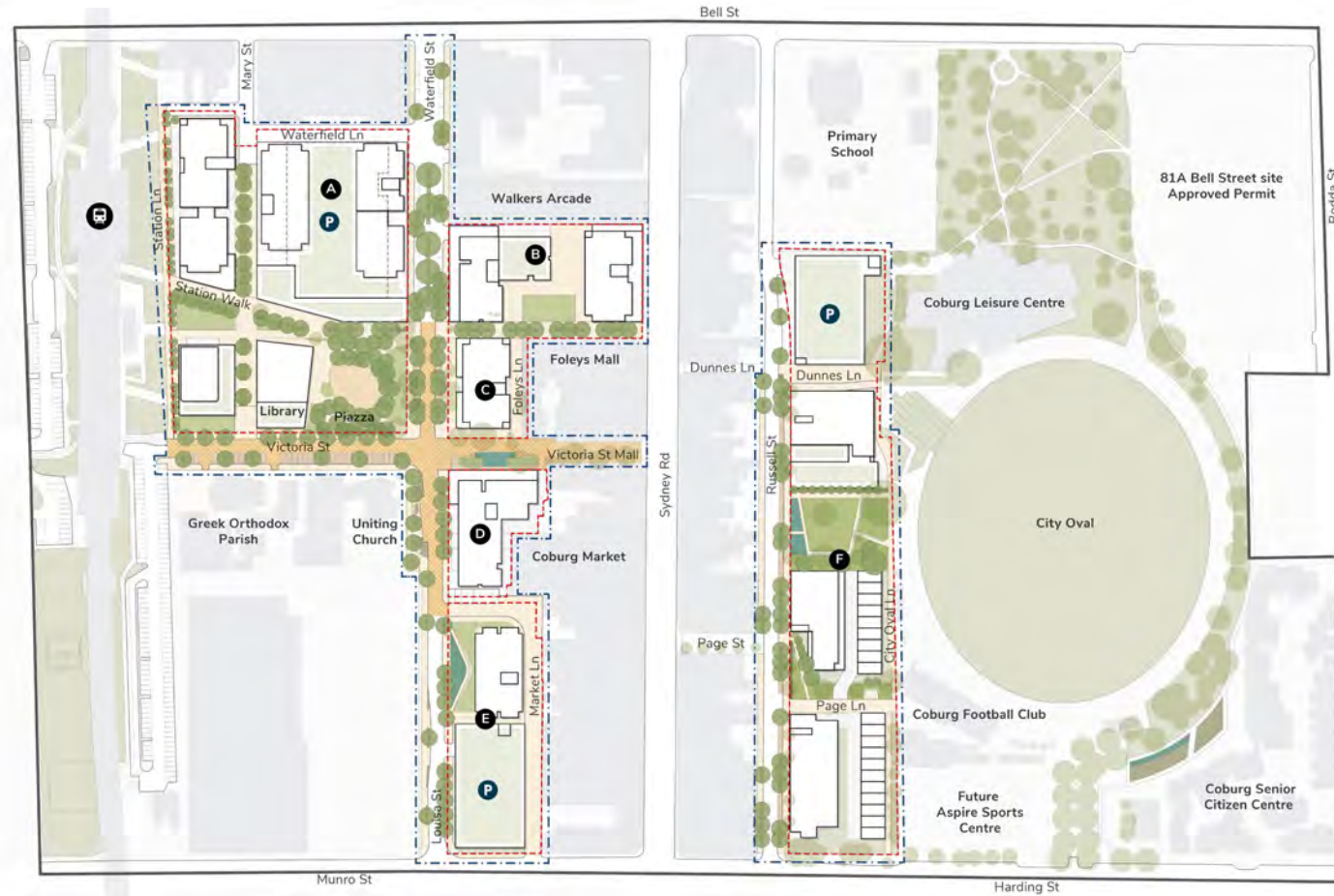
DELIVERING THE VISION

- ❖ The framework plan
- ❖ Coburg is community
- ❖ Coburg is thriving
- ❖ Coburg is home
- ❖ Coburg is open
- ❖ Coburg is accessible



Russell Neighbourhood Park, looking towards City Oval. Indicative visualisation by Narratives.

The framework plan



- | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Area | Buildings | Parking | Greening | Streets and laneways |
| □ Central Coburg Precinct | ■ Existing surrounding building | Ⓟ Proposed parking hubs | ■ Open space | ■ New and upgraded |
| □ Area of work | □ Proposed building | | ● Retained tree | ■ Central slow safe zone |
| □ The six sites | ⊗ Height (storeys) | | ● Proposed tree | |

Updated Precinct Framework vision.
Indicative image by MGS Architects.

Coburg is community

A community gathering place where the library, piazza and Victoria Street Mall will form the heart of central Coburg.



Narm Ngarrgu by Six Degrees. Photo by Dan Preston of Split Milk, courtesy of City of Melbourne.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is community

New library and piazza

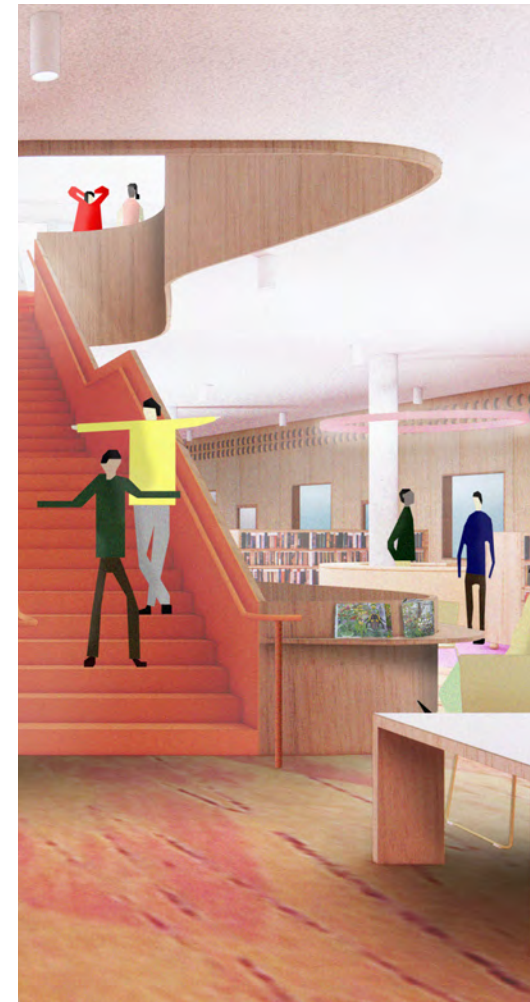
We are kickstarting the plan for central Coburg by designing and building a new library and piazza in the heart of Coburg. The current Coburg library is not fit for purpose and won't cater to the growing needs of our community. The new library and piazza will strengthen Coburg's civic heart and will be a welcoming place where people gather, connect, and celebrate.

The new library will include multipurpose event spaces, artist studios, bookable meeting rooms, a community kitchen, ample study and quiet spaces and a children's area on the ground floor. It will also host a local history space, prayer and sensory rooms and public bathroom and shower facilities making it much more than library.

The piazza will provide new shaded areas to sit and meet people, elements of play for all generations to enjoy and an informal mounded grass area to perch on with friends and enjoy some local snacks.

Council has appointed Durbach Block Jagers, working in collaboration with Architecture Associates and Openwork to design the new library and piazza. The draft concept design is being reviewed to explore opportunities to further strengthen connections between existing central icons in the heart of Coburg, and to respond to feedback about access, parking, cycling routes and the location of built form. Construction on the new library and piazza is planned for 2029.

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The draft concept for the library. Indicative visualisation by Durbach Block Jagers.

A new community mixed-use building is planned next to the library and across the road from the two churches

Community mixed-use building

We propose a new community mixed-use site next to the library and across the road from the two churches, forming a community-focussed precinct in the heart of central Coburg.

Led by a local community organisation(s), the building would support a broad range of community uses, services and activities, with potential opportunities for the arts, culture and creative uses that activate the precinct. This proposal is subject to a process to procure a suitable organisation(s) with a strong connection to Coburg.



Civic spine along Victoria Street with the churches, upgraded central streets and new library, piazza and community mixed-use building



View along Mary Walk looking towards Victoria Street. Indicative visualisation by Narrative.

High quality central streets will improve safety and enjoyment in the heart of Coburg.



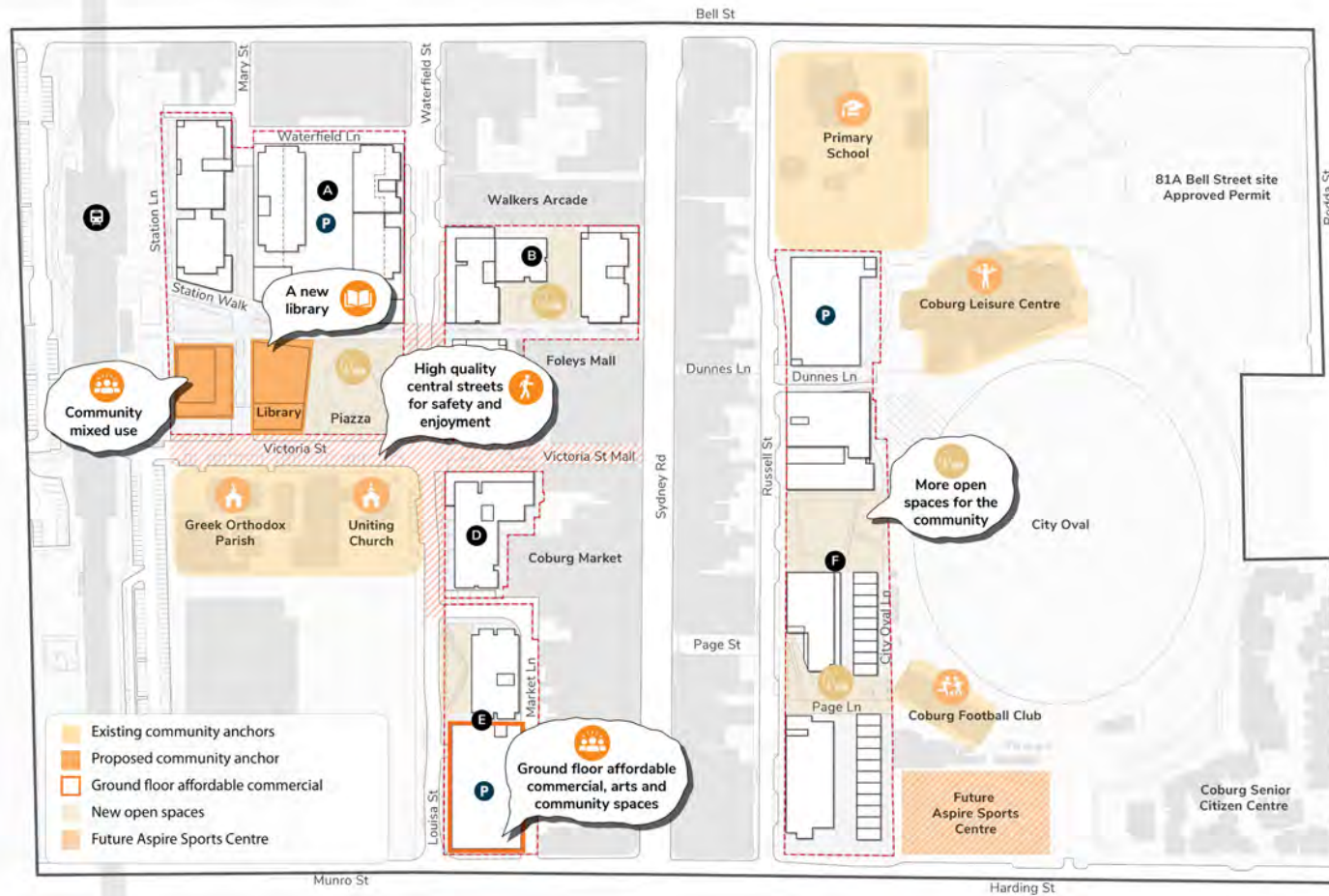
High quality, slow zone in Albert Street, Brunswick

Central heart

High quality central streets at the intersection of Victoria, Louisa and Waterfield Streets will improve safety and enjoyment in the heart of Coburg. Victoria Street Mall will also be revitalised and expanded as a key community destination. Upgrades to lighting, shopfronts and the public realm will enhance its character and appeal.

Other opportunities

- > Incorporate opportunities for public art and local expression in new buildings and streets.
- > Protect and frame key views, landmarks and culturally significant places.
- > Creating strong visual markers, clear sightlines, and legible connections that enhance sense of community.



Coburg is community. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

Coburg is thriving

A bustling place where diverse businesses will complement each other and create new life and energy.

More retail and office spaces

A new network of affordable shops and small businesses at ground level, particularly along new streets and laneways, will help draw people from the train station into the heart of Coburg.

We propose small “hole-in-the-wall” shops to larger spaces to create a lively and welcoming place to shop, meet and spend time, extending activity into the evening and supporting a safer, more vibrant Coburg.

More active street frontage will also create a more vibrant central Coburg, welcoming residents and encouraging them to spend locally.

In total, almost 11,000 square metres will be dedicated to new retail, commercial and office space, providing opportunities for local businesses to grow and thrive, and creating a more vibrant, active central Coburg.

Local economic boost and job creation

The project will also deliver significant local benefits during construction, generating around \$700 million in economic activity across Merri-bek and supporting approximately 265 local construction jobs each year.

Once complete, central Coburg will continue to contribute to the local economy, supporting around 300-350 ongoing jobs in new retail and commercial spaces. With around 2,000 new residents calling the area home, a further 50 jobs are expected to be created in the local community.

The ground floor of residential buildings could also be considered for home offices or other commercial uses. This will be subject to demand.

Mixed use building

Anchored by a new supermarket and other retail, a mixed-use building on Site A will include public parking, office space and be topped with apartments.



9 Wilson Ave Brunswick by Neometro. Photo by Michael Pham.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is thriving

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We propose around 1,000 sqm of new affordable space for community organisations on Louisa Street.



Sydney Road, Coburg. Photo by Simon Aurbor.

Supporting a thriving Sydney Road

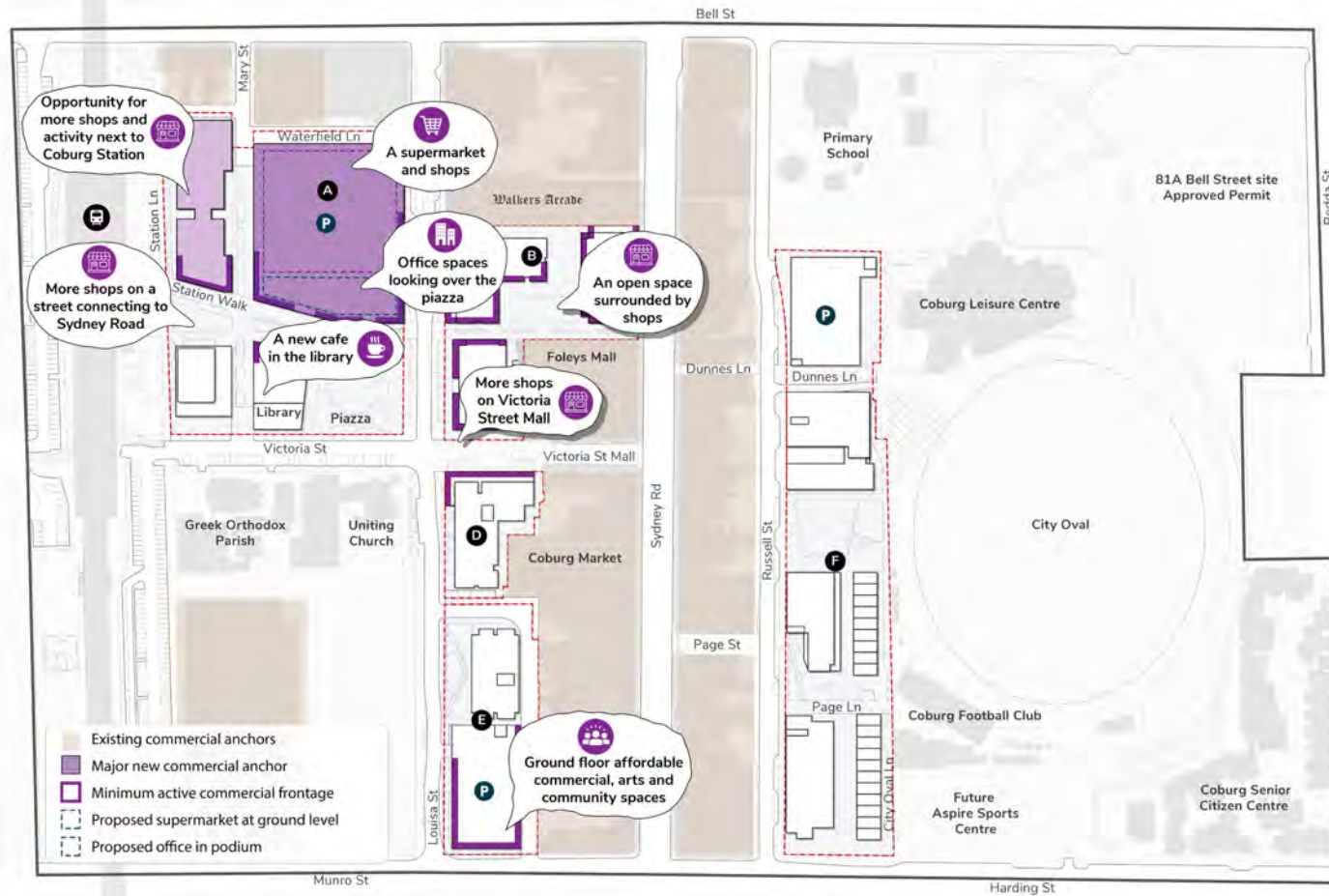
The vibrancy, safety and amenity of Sydney Road are fundamental to the success of local businesses in Coburg. Council will continue to partner with the Central Coburg Business Association to support the marketing, promotion and development of local businesses. This will be complemented by ongoing maintenance programs, improved street cleanliness and the identification of other opportunities to further enhance the quality and appeal of Sydney Road.

Affordable commercial space

We propose around 1,000 sqm of new affordable space for community organisations on Louisa Street. This will be in the ground floor of the car park building. It's proposed to be a home for creative industries, start ups, artists and small businesses.

Other opportunities

- > Maximise activation at ground floor near key destinations like Coburg Station, the library and the piazza.
- > Reinforce the precinct as a commercial heart that complements Sydney Road's existing trade.
- > Provide weather protection, such as awnings and canopies for new businesses.



Coburg is thriving. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is thriving

Coburg is home

A family-friendly place to live where jobs, shops, public transport, public spaces, schools and community facilities are all nearby.

New housing options in the heart of Coburg

We are planning to meet the needs of a growing community. Analysis shows that 6,340 more people will require homes in Coburg by 2037. Addressing this need will require action from all levels of government, and we are committed to playing our part. We propose about 1,000 new dwellings in 10 buildings. The plan aims to support around 2,000 new residents, with homes designed to meet a variety of needs.

Larger apartments for families

Flexibility is an important part of this approach. Apartment designs will be adaptable, allowing homes to change over time, for example, combining two smaller apartments to create a larger family-sized home. Lower-scale townhouses are also proposed near City Oval alongside new public open spaces, to provide more family-oriented housing choices. This proposal is subject to further market testing to understand changing demand.

Much needed social and affordable housing

There is a clear and growing need for more affordable housing. Across Merri-bek, more than 4,300 households are currently in need, with around 84 per cent classified as low or very low income. For this reason, increasing access to social and affordable housing is a key priority.

We are committed to providing at least 90 social housing dwellings and between 23% and 30% social and affordable housing across the precinct. We propose two buildings for social and affordable housing, and 10% affordable housing in all other residential buildings.

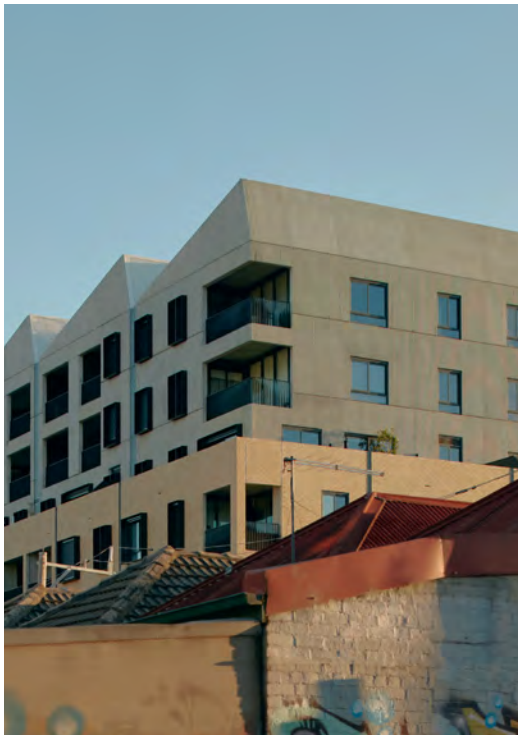
Feedback from the social and affordable housing sector has shown a preference for social housing to be provided in standalone buildings or mixed with affordable housing, rather than mixed with market housing. Dedicated buildings support building management and opportunities for service delivery for residents.

Our ability to deliver this is based on funding, grants and partnerships.



North Richmond Social Housing by Kerstin Thompson Architects and Hayball. Photo by Leo Showell.

To ensure development delivers lasting benefits, we have created clear development standards



Breese Street by Milieu, DKO and Breathe Architecture. Photo by Tom Ross.

Development standards to guide design quality

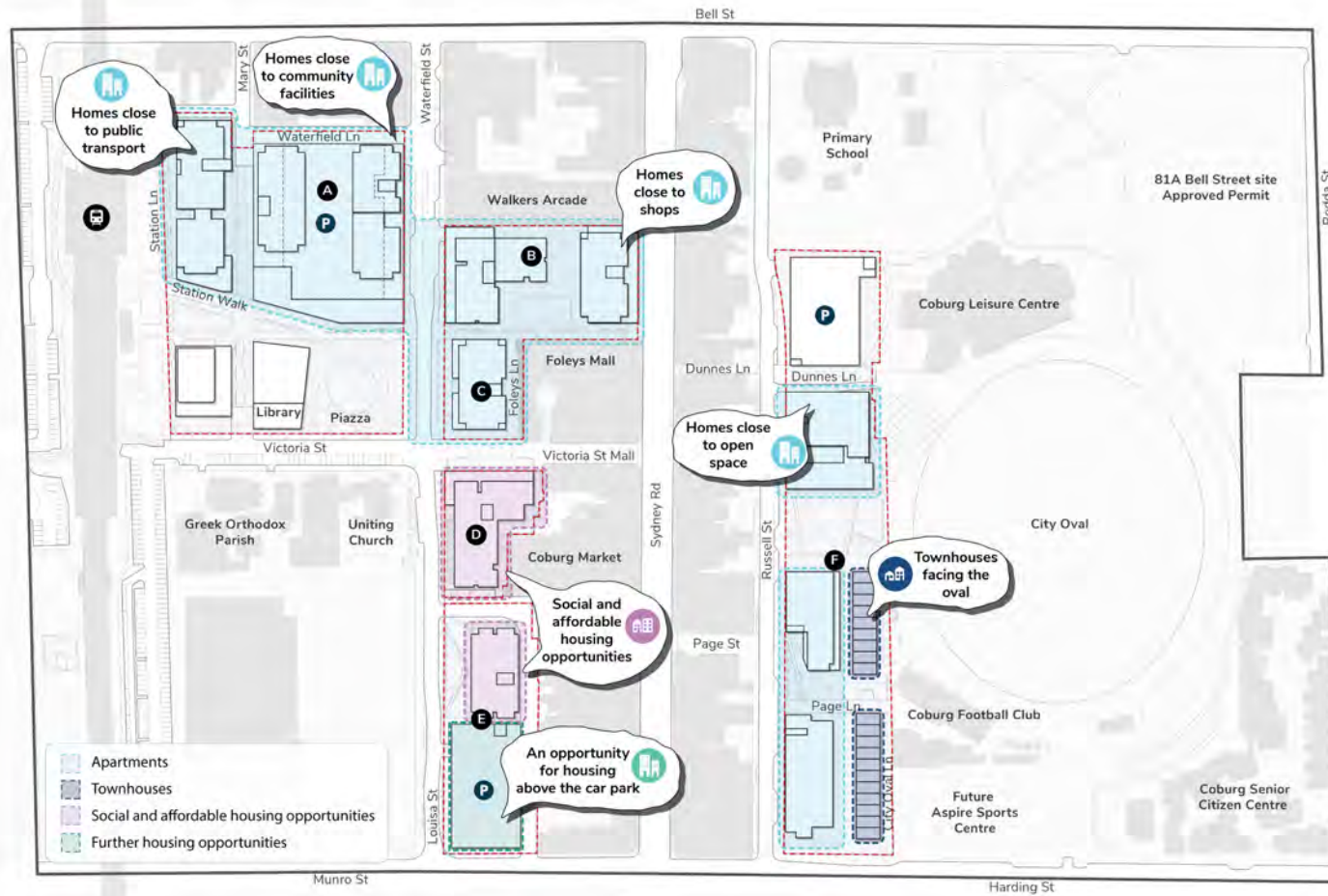
To ensure development delivers lasting benefits, we have created clear development standards to guide future projects in central Coburg. These standards will help deliver high-quality buildings, well-designed streets, and welcoming public spaces for the whole community.

Additional housing

There is an opportunity to provide housing on top of the multi-deck car parks. This will be explored.

Other opportunities

- > Exceed the 23% minimum social and affordable housing target.
- > Deliver a balanced mix of bedroom types across developments.
- > Integrate balconies, planting and shading devices in new residential buildings to create visual interest.



Coburg is home. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is home

Coburg is open

An open place where streets and parks provide comfortable, shady gathering places for the whole community.

Six new green spaces

Central Coburg will become greener, cooler and leafier, with a network of six new public open spaces delivering over 6,000 square metres of space for the community to enjoy. These spaces are thoughtfully located around existing mature trees, helping to retain biodiversity and the established character of the precinct.

Across the precinct, every resident will be within a short 300 metre walk of a public open space, with at least 5 square metres of open space per person.

Diverse planting

Open spaces designed around existing mature trees, with diverse planting that supports birds, insects and biodiversity. The new open spaces will also strengthen biodiversity and climate resilience. Urban wetlands, canopy trees and understory vegetation, will create habitats for birds and insects.

Integrated water management

The design of new public spaces is driven by a commitment to improve water management and climate resilience. As well as providing attractive and usable places for people, they will play an important role in managing stormwater, supporting urban cooling, improving biodiversity helping to reduce the impacts of heavy rainfall both within and beyond the precinct. Water-sensitive urban design initiatives such as raingardens, permeable surfaces, passive irrigation and stormwater harvesting will help direct and retain water within landscaped areas, supporting healthier trees and greener public spaces while reducing reliance on potable water.

Further opportunities for sustainable water use will continue to be explored, including the potential to capture and reuse water from City Oval to irrigate and support the long-term health of public spaces across the precinct.

Views to green spaces

New open spaces will also be highly visible and well connected, with many new homes and businesses directly fronting these spaces, providing attractive outlooks and bringing greenery into everyday life across the precinct.

Healthy canopy cover

Across the precinct, more than 200 new trees will be planted. An aspirational 40 per cent tree canopy target will further strengthen Coburg's resilience to heat, ensuring the area remains comfortable and connected as it grows. Powerlines will be located underground where possible to enable significant canopy growth. Together, these initiatives will help reduce the urban heat island effect and create a cooler, more comfortable environment. Water-sensitive urban design initiatives, including passive irrigation, raingardens, stormwater harvesting and permeable surfaces, will help support long-term tree health and resilience by directing stormwater into landscaped areas and reducing reliance on potable water.



Balfe Park by Kerstin Thompson Architects. Photo by Leo Showell.

An open place where streets and parks provide comfortable, shady gathering places for the whole community.



Monash University Maths by Emergent Studios. Photo by Tom Ross.

Access to sunlight

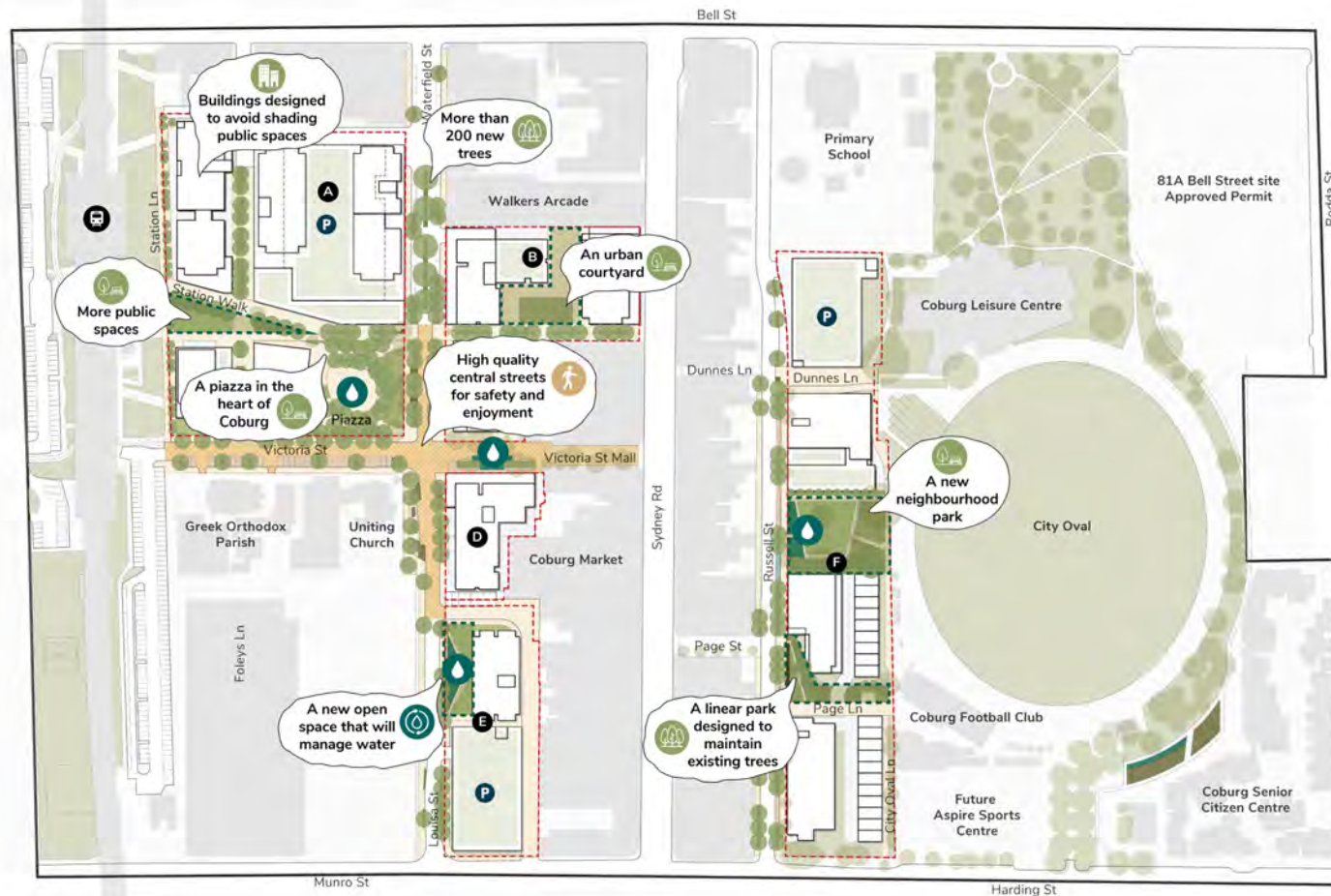
The design of new buildings has been carefully considered to support these outcomes. Heights ranging from 3 to 18 storeys are arranged to protect sunlight access to both new and existing public spaces, as well as key pedestrian streets. Upper levels are set back to create a more open, human scaled streetscape, while minimising wind and overshadowing impacts.

Central heart

High quality central streets at the intersection of Victoria, Louisa and Waterfield Streets will improve safety and enjoyment in the heart of Coburg. The streets will be designed to reduce the amount of through traffic that passes through the centre of Coburg.

Other opportunities

- > Deliver a connected and biodiverse landscape that supports habitat.
- > Deliver climate positive development that goes beyond net zero by generating surplus renewable energy.
- > Provide a recycling hub to enable effective ongoing resource recovery for residents.



Coburg is open. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is open

Coburg is accessible

Moving through central Coburg will be easier and more enjoyable, with a new network of green streets and laneways.



Newcastle East End by SBJ et al. Photo by Brett Boardman.

An improved street network for all

Moving through central Coburg will be easier and more enjoyable, with a new network of green streets and laneways lined with diverse businesses, linking Coburg Station, Victoria Street Mall and Sydney Road. A 40% tree canopy cover target within new streets and open spaces will provide shade and cooling.

Upgrades to existing streets, will create safer and more direct routes for people walking and cycling through the area. These include a mix of off-road paths and shared low-speed streets, designed to support cycling while prioritising safety for all users.

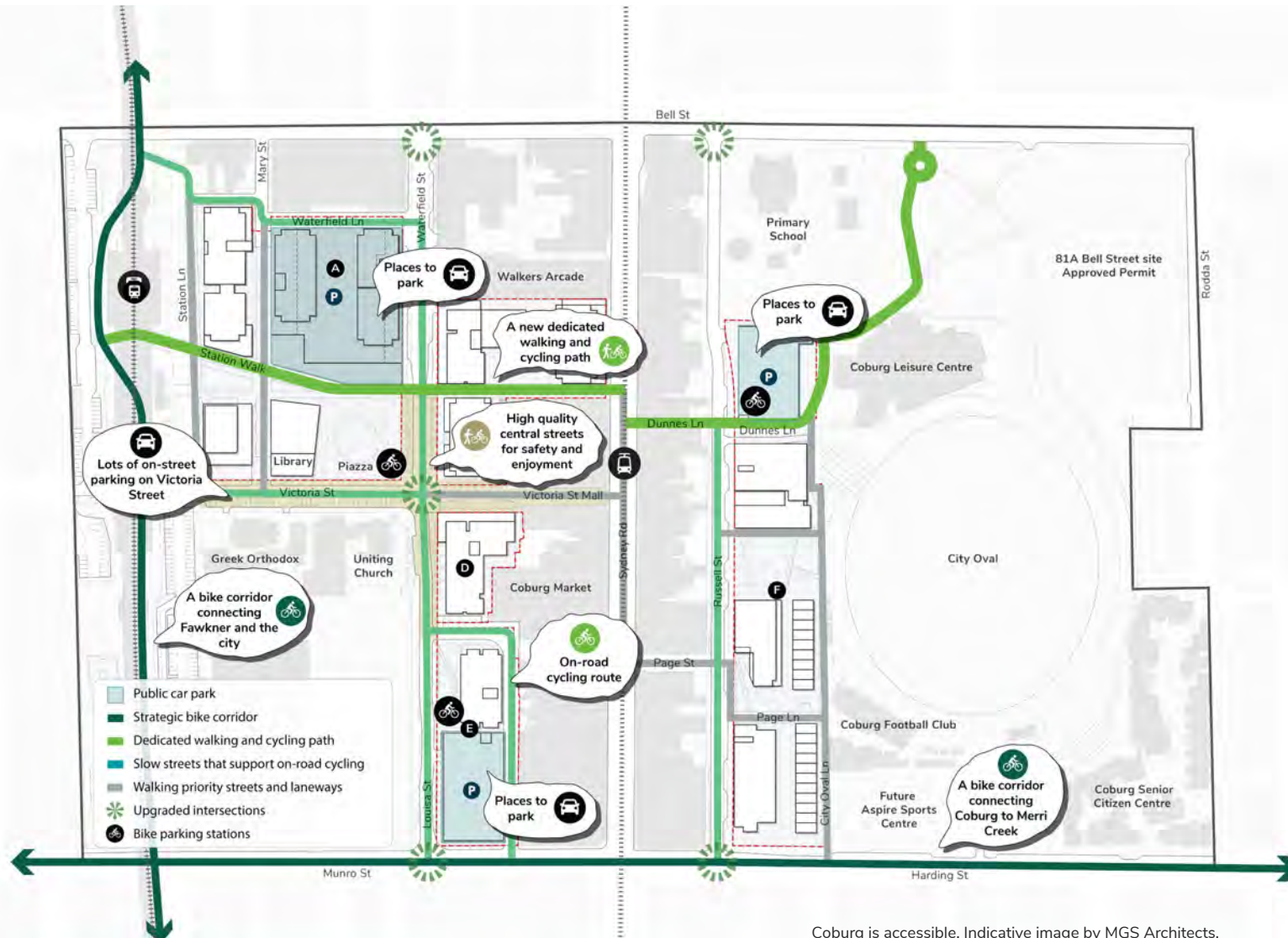
Traffic management

Traffic analysis shows the surrounding road network can accommodate the changes associated with the development, with the traffic network operating at a similar level to existing conditions today. At the same time, there is an opportunity to improve how people move through central Coburg.

We have identified a series of targeted intersection upgrades to enhance safety and accessibility, including:

- > Introducing bicycle lanes at the Munro Street / Harding Street / Sydney Road intersection
- > Simplifying turning movements at the Bell Street / Russell Street intersection
- > Improving safety at the Louisa Street / Munro Street roundabout
- > Enhancing line-marking at the Bell Street / Waterfield Street intersection
- > Introducing traffic calming measures at the Victoria Street / Victoria Street Mall and Waterfield Street intersection

Further traffic studies will be undertaken at each stage of the project as the design progresses to ensure these changes continue to support safe and efficient movement. Other improvements will be achieved through the removal of vehicle crossovers, reducing conflicts between drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. Together, these changes will support a safer, more accessible environment for all users.



Delivering the vision > Coburg is accessible

Dedicated cycling routes to and through central Coburg and bike parking at key destinations will improve safety and access.



38 Albermarle Street Kensington by Assemble and Fieldwork.
Photo by Tom Ross.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is accessible

A better connection to Coburg Station

Station Walk will provide a direct and legible connection between Coburg Station and Sydney Road, supporting pedestrian movement as well as slow cycling to key destinations such as the new library and piazza.

Safer cycling routes

Making it easier and safer to ride a bike is an important part of supporting a more vibrant and connected Coburg. Dedicated cycling routes to and through central Coburg, along with convenient bike parking at popular destinations, will make it simpler for more people to choose cycling for everyday trips.

A mix of cycling options will be provided to suit different comfort levels. Off-road shared paths will offer safe, slower routes that are ideal for families, children and less confident riders. On-road bike lanes will also be available for more confident cyclists, supported by measures such as lower speed limits, traffic calming, and safer crossings to help everyone feel more comfortable sharing the street.

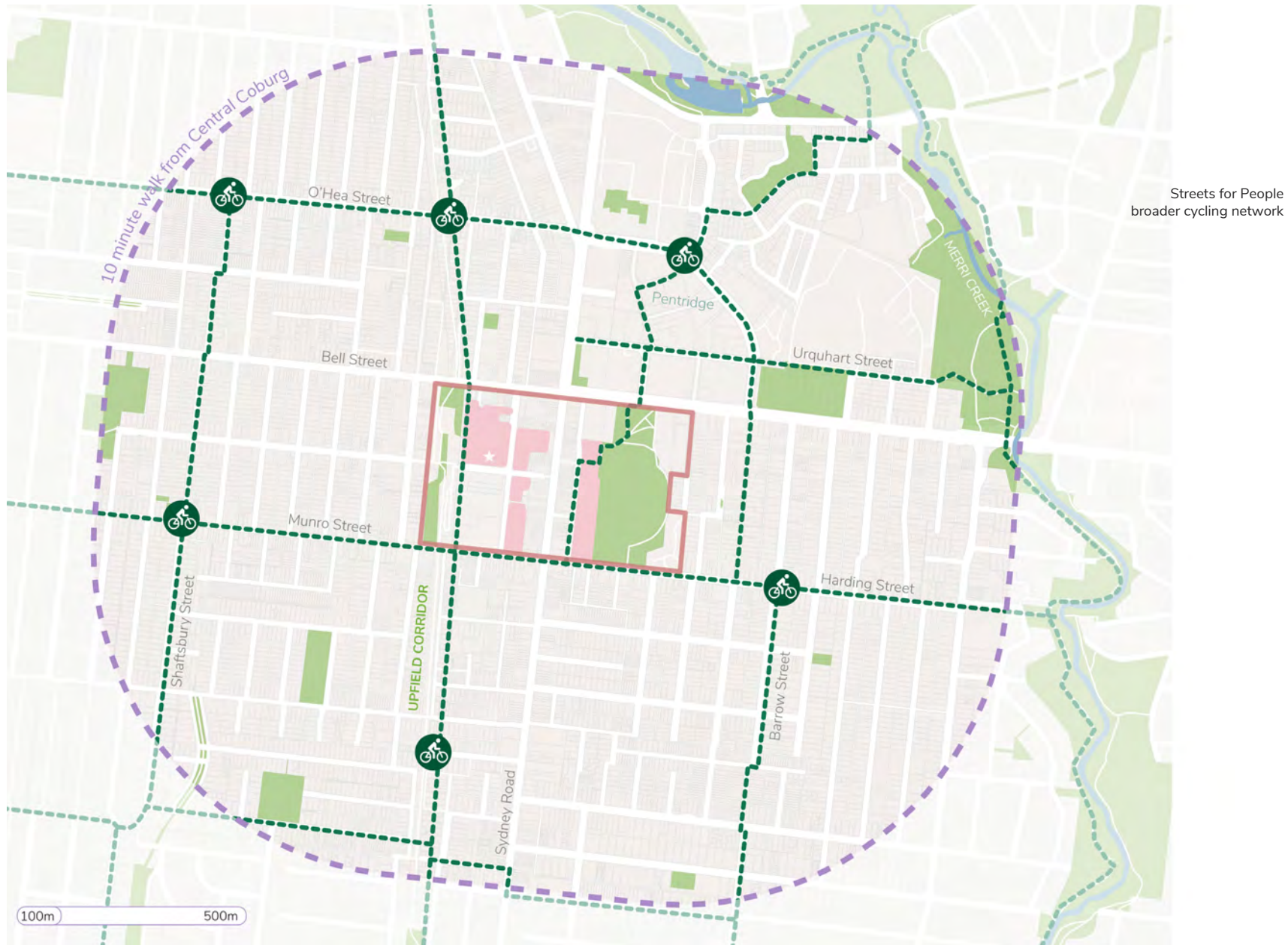
Clear guidance on the future design of streets and laneways is included in the development standards for central Coburg.

These local changes will be supported by broader work across Merri-bek, including the Streets for People Plan, which is focused on creating a connected network of safe and welcoming cycling routes across the municipality.

Everyone agrees that improvements to Sydney Road a necessary to support our businesses and community to support a more vibrant and successful precinct in Coburg.

A better Sydney Road

There is strong community support for improvements to Sydney Road to better support local businesses and create a more vibrant and welcoming central Coburg. Council is advocating for the State Government to work closely with traders and the community to shape the future of Sydney Road, and to explore opportunities that enhance vibrancy, connectivity, safety, liveability, greening and accessibility.



An accessible place where people will comfortably walk, cycle, catch public transport or drive and park their car.

Plenty of public car parking

Parking plays an important role for many local businesses and visitors to central Coburg, particularly for those who find it more difficult to access the area by other modes of transport. To support this, around 900 public car spaces will be reprovided, equating to approximately 80% of existing supply, which has considered current and future parking demand patterns.

All parts of central Coburg will be within a short, two-minute walk of public parking in three new multi-deck parking locations. We are also proposing to introduce smart parking signage which directs people to available parking and reduces the number of people circling the precinct looking for a park.

Well-designed public car parks

The design of multi-deck car parks will also be carefully considered to ensure they make a positive contribution to the area. Ground floors will incorporate affordable commercial spaces to bring activity to the street, while features such as green façades, rooftop landscaping, and public art will help soften their appearance and integrate them into the surrounding neighbourhood.

On-street parking

A careful approach to street design will ensure greening aspirations are balanced with the need for accessible on-street parking. On-street spaces will be prioritised for accessible parking, short-term stays, and loading, while off-street parking will cater to longer-term use, trader parking, and EV charging.

Managing parking through staging

Parking provision will be front of mind when staging and construction is underway to ensure workers, residents and shoppers have adequate access to central Coburg throughout the delivery of the project.

Private car parking for new residents and workers

In addition to publicly accessible car parking, new private parking will be provided for residents and businesses as part of future development, with the final amount of parking provided to be confirmed in future stages. Measures will also be put in place to mitigate the impacts of increased parking demand on existing residents in surrounding streets.



Multi-deck carpark in Copenhagen, Park 'n' Play by JAJA Architects. Photo by Katherine Sundermann.

Waterfield and Louisa

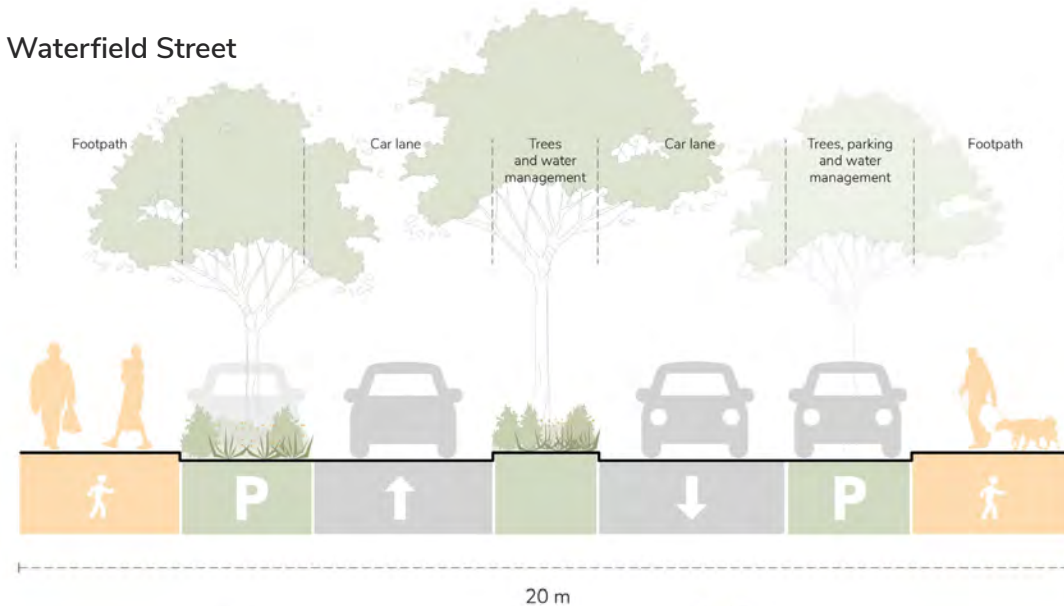
The Waterfield and Louisa Street corridor will include safer pedestrian paths, more trees, safer road crossings, integrated water management, on-street parking and loading zones. Cycling will be supported through on-road routes designed to be shared with slow-moving traffic, creating a safer and more comfortable environment for people riding.

It will form a secondary north-south cycling route through central Coburg. The central part of Waterfield Street and Louisa Street will have its own character, prioritising pedestrians and cyclists in the centre while still allowing for slow traffic movements.

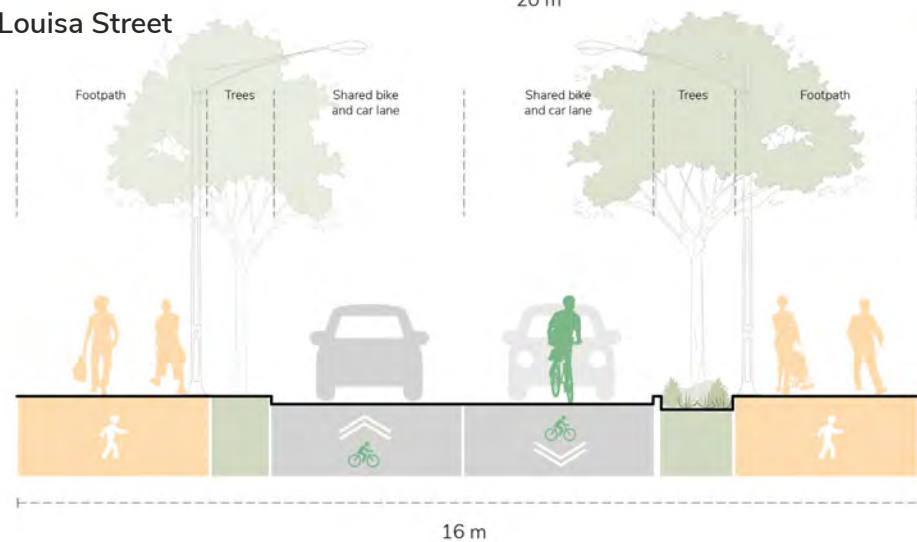
Indicative sections by GLAS Landscape Architects.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is accessible

Waterfield Street



Louisa Street



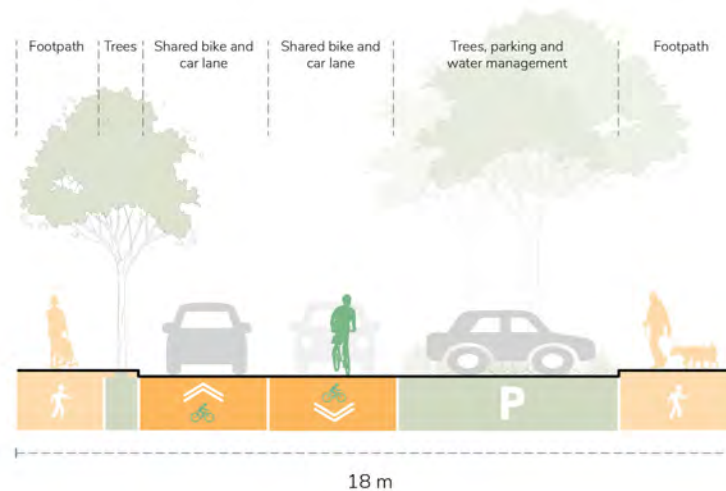
Victoria Street and Victoria Mall

Victoria Street Mall will be upgraded to better support local businesses to thrive. The safety, pedestrian friendly character of the mall will be extended to the west, improving the connection between the mall to the new library and piazza.

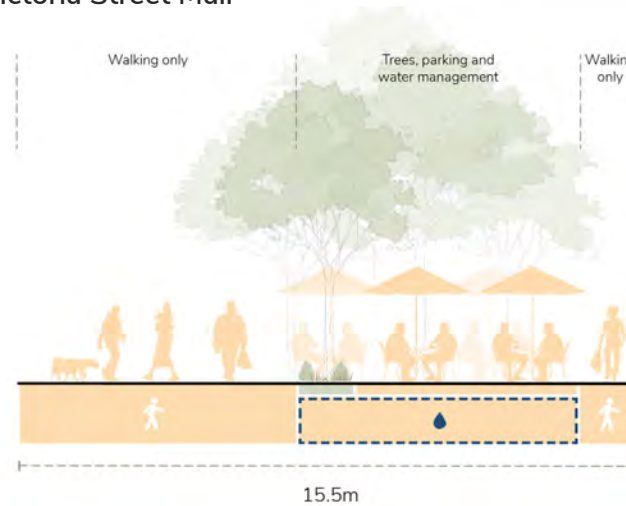
The street will be greener with more trees and integrated water management. As well as greenery, it will still have lots of on-street parking to make sure there are options for people to park close to important destinations like Victoria Street Mall, the new library and piazza and the churches. Like Waterfield Street and Louisa Street, Victoria Street will have a special character, prioritising pedestrians while still allowing for traffic to move through slowly. This space could incorporate public art and distinctive surface treatments to calm traffic, create a strong sense of place, and invite people to spend time in the area, whether visiting the new library, local shops or community services. These changes will celebrate the heart of Coburg and improve safety for all users.

Indicative sections by GLAS Landscape Architects.

Victoria Street



Victoria Street Mall



Station Walk

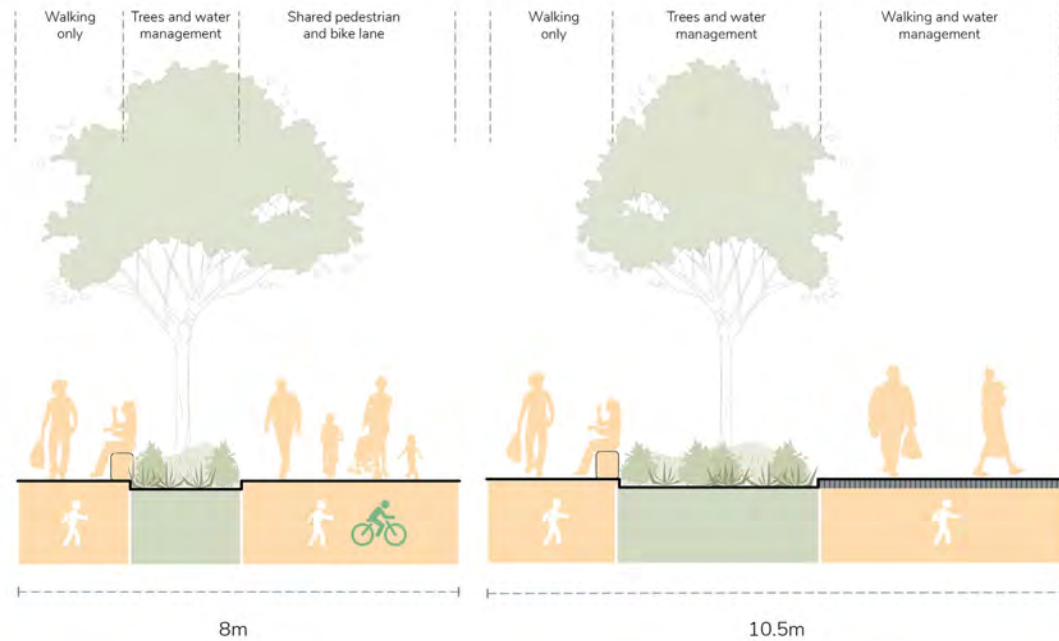
A new laneway will connect Coburg Station to the library, piazza, Waterfield Street and Sydney Road, creating views to the old heritage station. A shared cycling path will provide a safe route for slow cycling between the Upfield bike corridor and key destinations. The laneway will be lined with shops, businesses, the library and two new public spaces. It will have places to sit, be shaded from large trees and be designed to manage water.

Mary Walk

Mary Walk is a new safe pedestrian laneway connecting Mary Street to Victoria Street, with clear views to the Presentation of Our Lord church in the south. The laneway will be lined with community uses, shops and new homes. It will have places to sit, be shaded with large trees and be designed to manage water.

Indicative sections by GLAS Landscape Architects.

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Station Walk

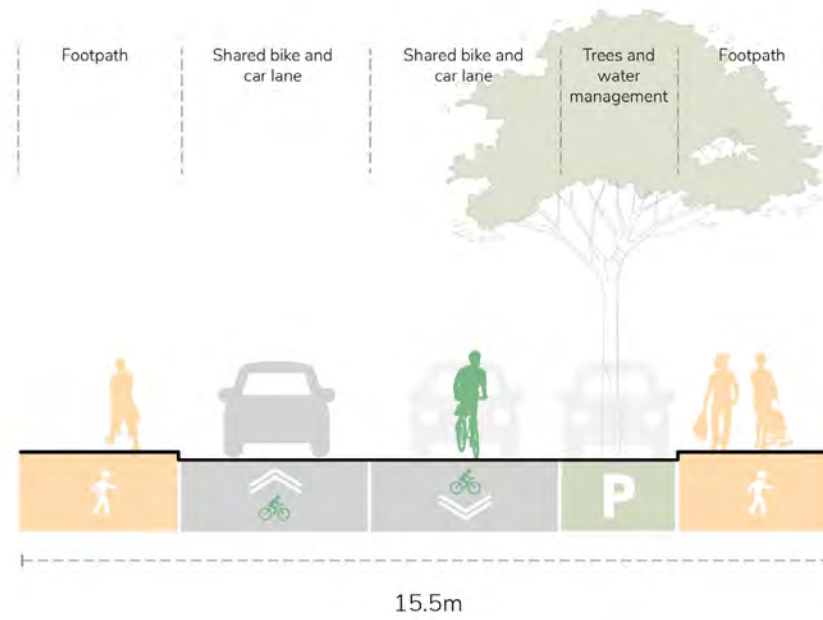
Mary Walk



View along Station Walk looking towards the former Coburg Station. Indicative visualisation by Narrative.

Russell Street

Russell Street will have safe and accessible walking paths, on-street parking and big street trees. Cycling will be supported through on-road routes designed to be shared with slow-moving traffic, creating a safer and more comfortable environment for people riding. The street will connect the Coburg Leisure Centre, the multi-deck carpark, new homes, new public spaces and the future Aspire Centre.



Russell Street

Indicative section by GLAS Landscape Architects.

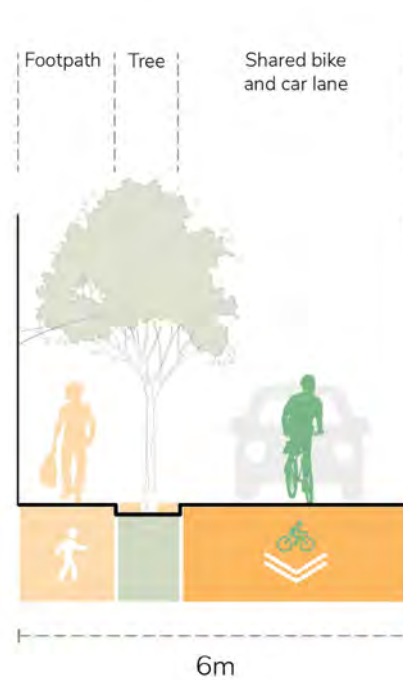
Delivering the vision > Coburg is accessible

Laneways

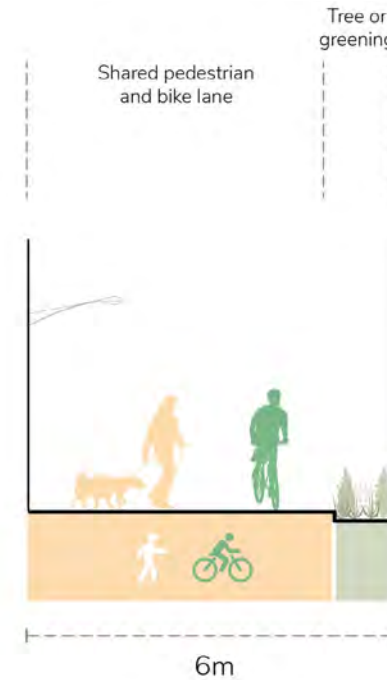
New laneways throughout central Coburg will provide greening and more ways to get around for all users. All laneways will be designed to support safe cycling and walking through central Coburg and to include greening where possible. While some laneways will be for pedestrians and cyclists only, others will allow for cars in order to support access to new and existing businesses.

Indicative sections by GLAS Landscape Architects.

Delivering the vision > Coburg is accessible



Driving, walking and cycling lane



Walking and cycling lane

THE PLAN FOR EACH SITE

- ❖ The six sites
- ❖ Site A
- ❖ Site B & C
- ❖ Site D
- ❖ Site E
- ❖ Site F



An updated framework for central Coburg. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

The plan for each site

The six sites

Each of the six sites offers a distinct opportunity for transformation. Varying in size, form, and surrounding context, each site calls for a tailored design response that reflects its unique characteristics.

Waterfield West

Site A is ideally suited for a mix of housing, retail, and commercial uses. Its immediate proximity to Coburg Station and the Upfield Corridor makes it highly accessible by public transport, as well as by walking and cycling.

Waterfield East

Site B is located along Sydney Road and within easy walking distance of the station, presents a great opportunity for vibrant retail and urban living.

Victoria North and Victoria South

Site C and D sit at the heart of Coburg, opening onto the Victoria Street Mall. These sites will bring new activity to the area with ground-floor retail and housing above, complementing existing businesses on Victoria Street Mall.

Louisa East

Site E will include a new public open space, housing and a multi-deck carpark. New residents will have direct access and views to greenery and the overall character of Louisa Street will be improved.

Russell East

Site F will include new public spaces, a multi-deck carpark, apartments and townhouses. New residents will live in direct proximity to City Oval, Bridges Reserve and the Coburg Leisure Centre with future residents having direct access to public open space and community facilities.

Site A

Waterfield West (A) is home to the new Coburg Library and piazza, housing, offices, retail and a new supermarket. Buildings range in height from up to 6-18 storeys.



A new library and piazza

A new library and piazza will hold pride of place in central Coburg. The library will provide a welcoming space, services and resources for the local community, and the piazza will provide a green outdoor space for recreation, relaxation and events. The project is already underway, with doors expected to open in 2029.

More public open space

Station Triangle will be a new public space outside of the old heritage station. The space will welcome people into the area when arriving from Coburg Station and the Upfield Corridor.

New community spaces

On site A1, a new community mixed-use building delivered and operated by local community organisation(s). The maximum building envelope will be equivalent of around six-storeys. This new building will complement the existing local community infrastructure, expanding the offering for locals and visitors to central Coburg. This proposal is subject to a process to procure a suitable organisation(s) with a strong connection to Coburg.

The plan for each site > Site A

A new laneway network

Station Walk will link Coburg Station and Waterfield Street, and Mary Walk will connect Mary Street and Victoria Street.

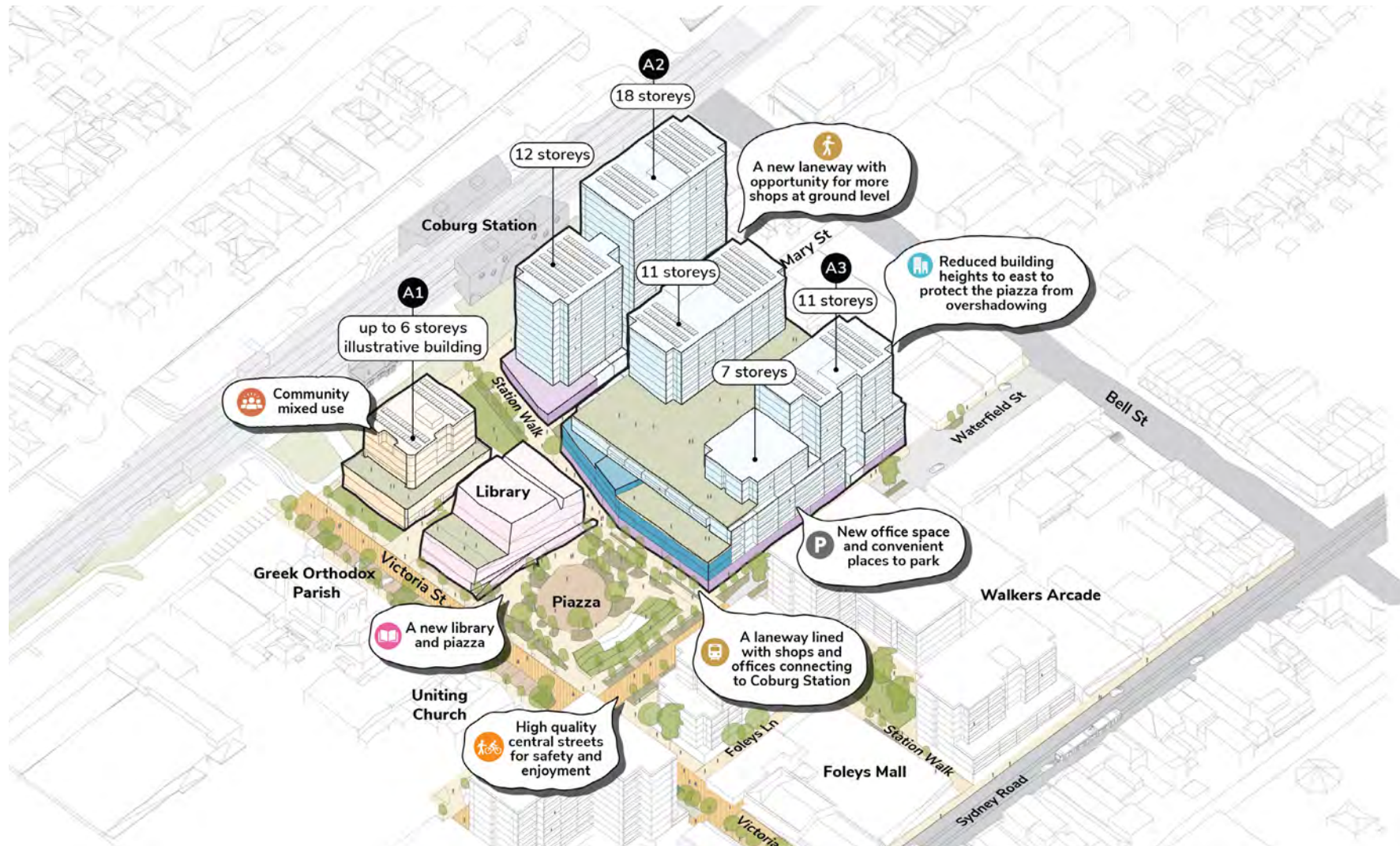
A taller building next to Coburg Station

Building A2 will be an 18-storey building that is mostly residential with some shops and businesses at the ground floor. There is an opportunity to explore additional employment uses in the ground floor of the building. An underground car park provides parking for new residents and businesses.

A mixed-use building with public parking

Building A3 will be an 11-storey building with a supermarket, shops and businesses to complement the existing hive of activity on Victoria Street Mall and Sydney Road. The upper levels of the building are setback to maintain solar access to the piazza. Public parking will be provided above the supermarket, a short walk to key destinations in central Coburg.

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Site A. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

The plan for each site > Site A

Site B & C

Waterfield East (B) and Victoria North (C) will provide spaces to live, shop, and gather, centred around a new urban courtyard. Buildings range in height from 5-11 storeys.



An urban courtyard

An urban courtyard provides a place to gather and creates high quality views for those living at Waterfield East and Victoria North.

A new laneway network

Station Walk will link Coburg Station, Waterfield Street and Sydney Road. Foleys Lane will connect Station Walk to Victoria Street Mall.

A taller building on Waterfield Street

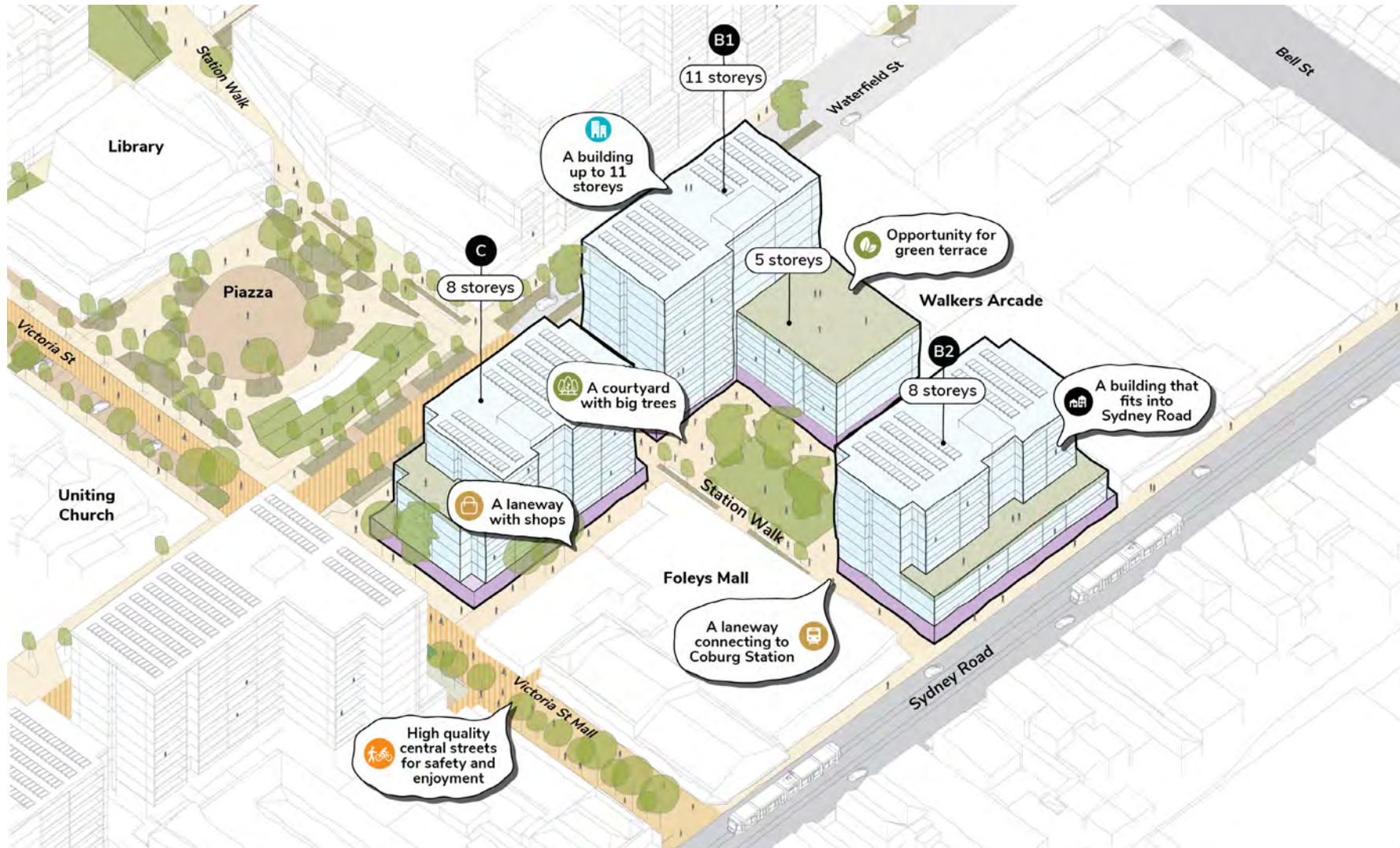
Building B1 will be an 11-storey building that steps down 5-storeys in the east to protect the urban courtyard from overshadowing. It will have shops and businesses at the ground floor onto both Waterfield Street and the urban courtyard. An underground car park provides parking for new residents and businesses on site.

A building on Sydney Road

Building B2 will be an 8-storey building with a lower street wall to Sydney Road. At ground level, flexible retail spaces will create new opportunities for businesses and generate activity along Sydney Road and Station Walk.

A building on Victoria Street Mall

Building C will be an 8-storey building with a lower street wall to Victoria Street Mall to integrate with the existing character of the mall and protect it from overshadowing. At ground level, flexible retail spaces will create new opportunities for businesses and generate activity along Sydney Road and Station Walk. A new laneway to the east will maintain access to existing shops and businesses, including Foley's Mall.



Site B & C. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

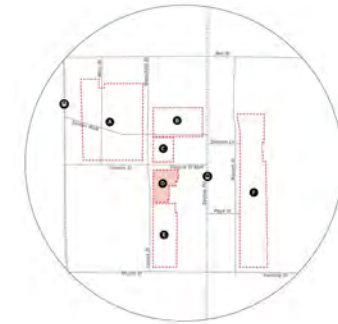
The plan for each site > Site B & C

Site D

Victoria South (D) is a place to live and shop right on Victoria Street Mall.

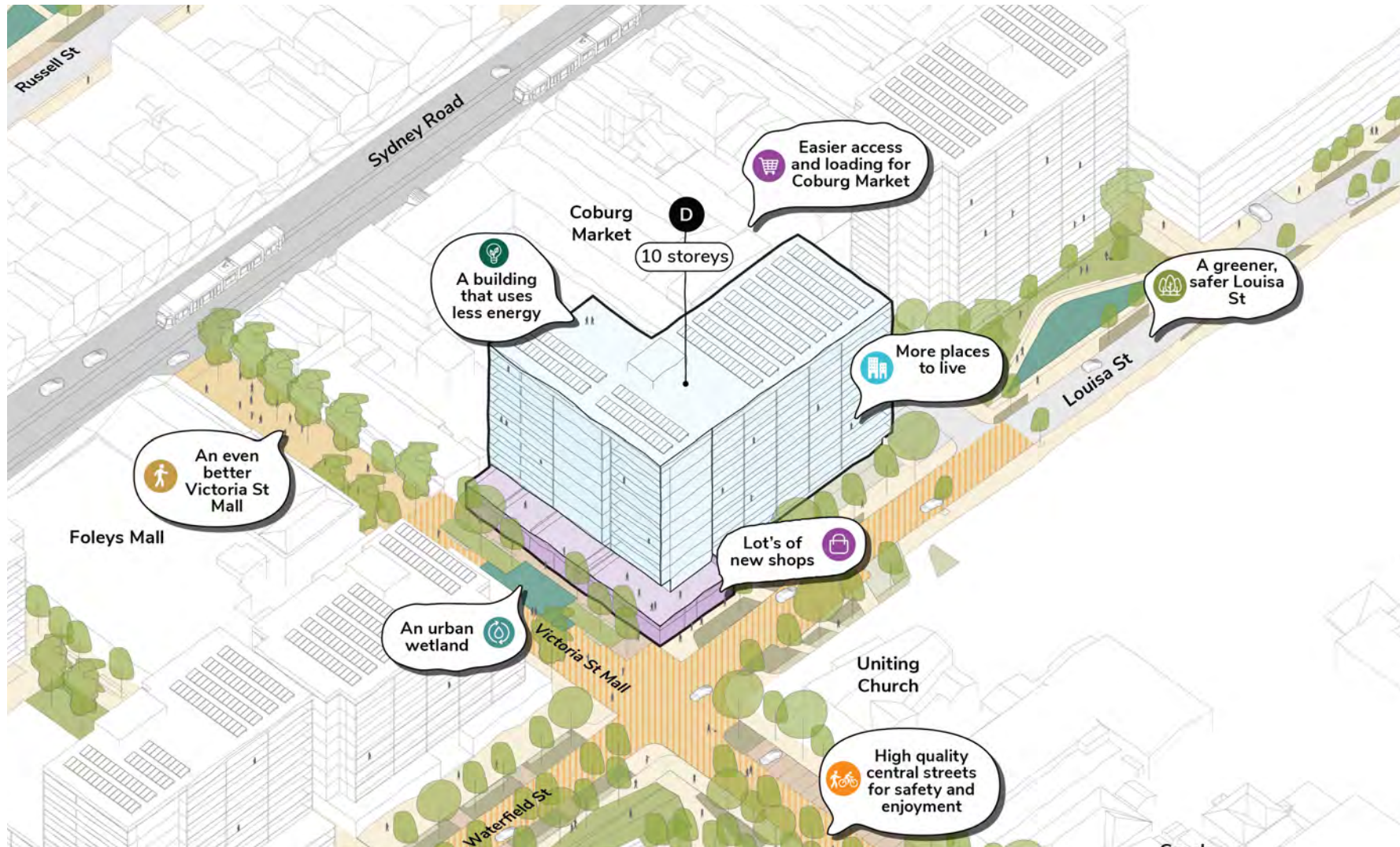
An extension of Victoria Street Mall

A new extension of the mall will be connected to the piazza by a new slow, safe zone at the intersection of Victoria, Louisa and Waterfield Streets, expanding places for the community to gather in the heart of Coburg. Victoria Street Mall will also be upgraded, respecting and celebrating the much-loved character of the mall as the centre of Coburg. New shops at the ground floor of Building D will complement the diversity of existing well-loved and much-visited businesses on Victoria Street Mall.



Convenient housing options

Building D will be a 10-storey building with housing at the upper levels, allowing people to live right in the middle of central Coburg. The upper levels of the building will be setback above the ground level to respect the low scale of the buildings along the mall.



Site D. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

The plan for each site > Site D

Site E

Louisa East (E) includes housing, a multi-deck car park, and a new public space.



New housing and a pocket park

Building E will be a 12-storey residential building. It will overlook a new pocket park that features an urban wetland. This wetland will provide a distinctive landscape for the community to enjoy while also playing an important role in water management.

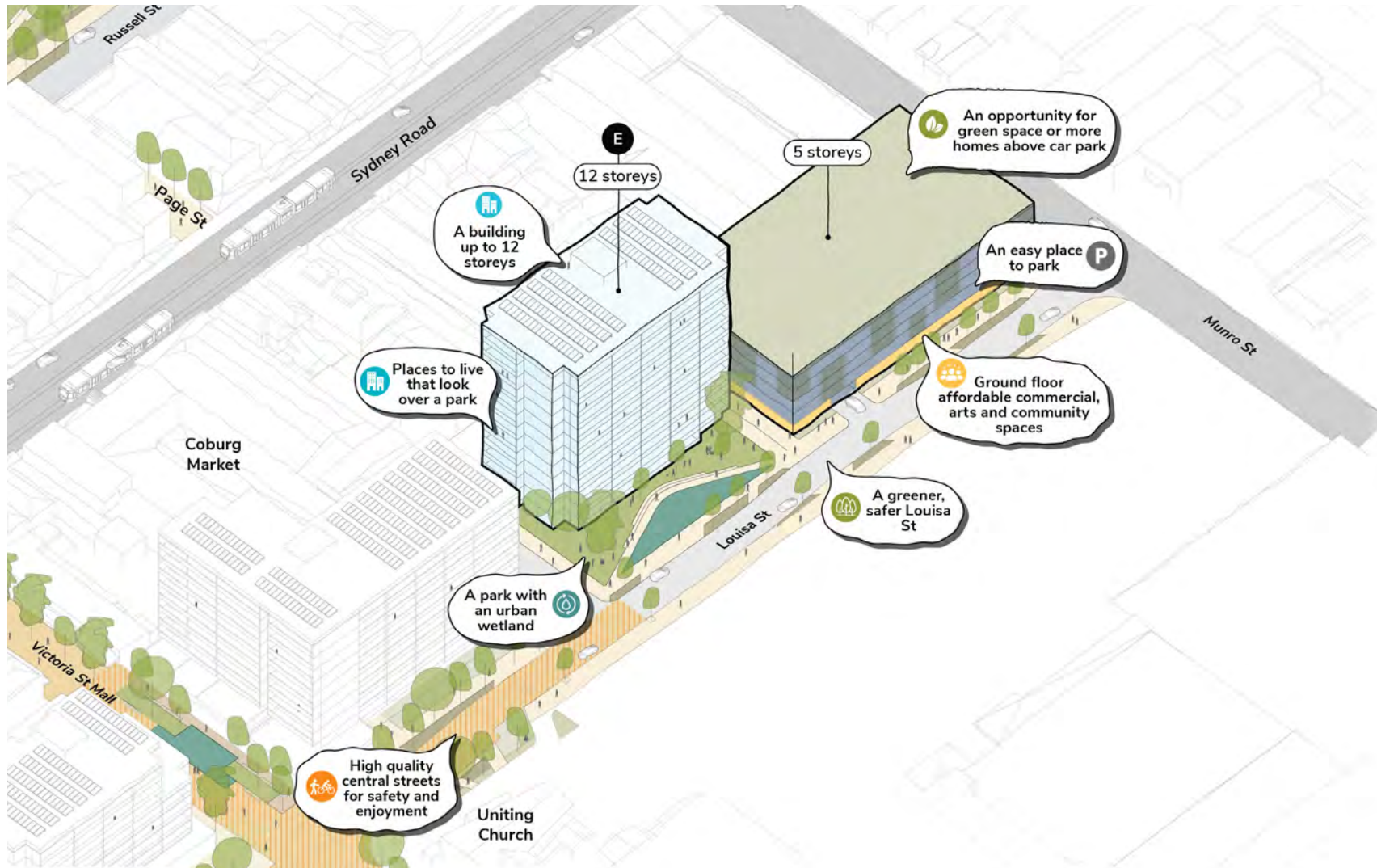
More public parking with an active ground floor

To the south, a new five-storey multi-deck car park will consolidate existing public parking in a convenient location, just a short walk from Victoria Street Mall and Sydney Road.

At ground level, the car park will incorporate affordable commercial uses, activating Louis Street and contributing to street life. The building will also integrate greening across its roof and façade, with further design detail to be developed in future stages. There is also the opportunity for housing on top of the car park building.

More new connections to Sydney Road

A new laneway between the buildings will create a connection through the centre of the site, improving permeability and access to Sydney Road.



Site E. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

The plan for each site > Site E

Site F

Russell East (F) will deliver a mix of well-designed apartments and townhouses, offering diverse living options overlooking City Oval and with the Coburg Leisure Centre at their doorstep.

More green open space for Coburg

A neighbourhood park and a linear park will provide new open spaces for the community to enjoy. The parks are carefully arranged around existing, healthy mature trees and connect Russell Street to City Oval. An urban wetland within the neighbourhood park to the north will support natural water management while also providing habitat for local birdlife and insects.

A new laneway network

A new laneway network, including along City Oval and inbetween buildings will provide safe walking and cycling paths to better connect Russell Street to City Oval, Coburg Leisure Centre and the future Aspire Centre.

Apartments next to City Oval

Building F1 will be an 8-storey building that steps down to 4-storeys in the south to protect overshadowing of the neighbourhood park. Many of the apartments will have views to City Oval in the east and views to the neighbourhood park in the south.



Apartments and townhouses next to City Oval

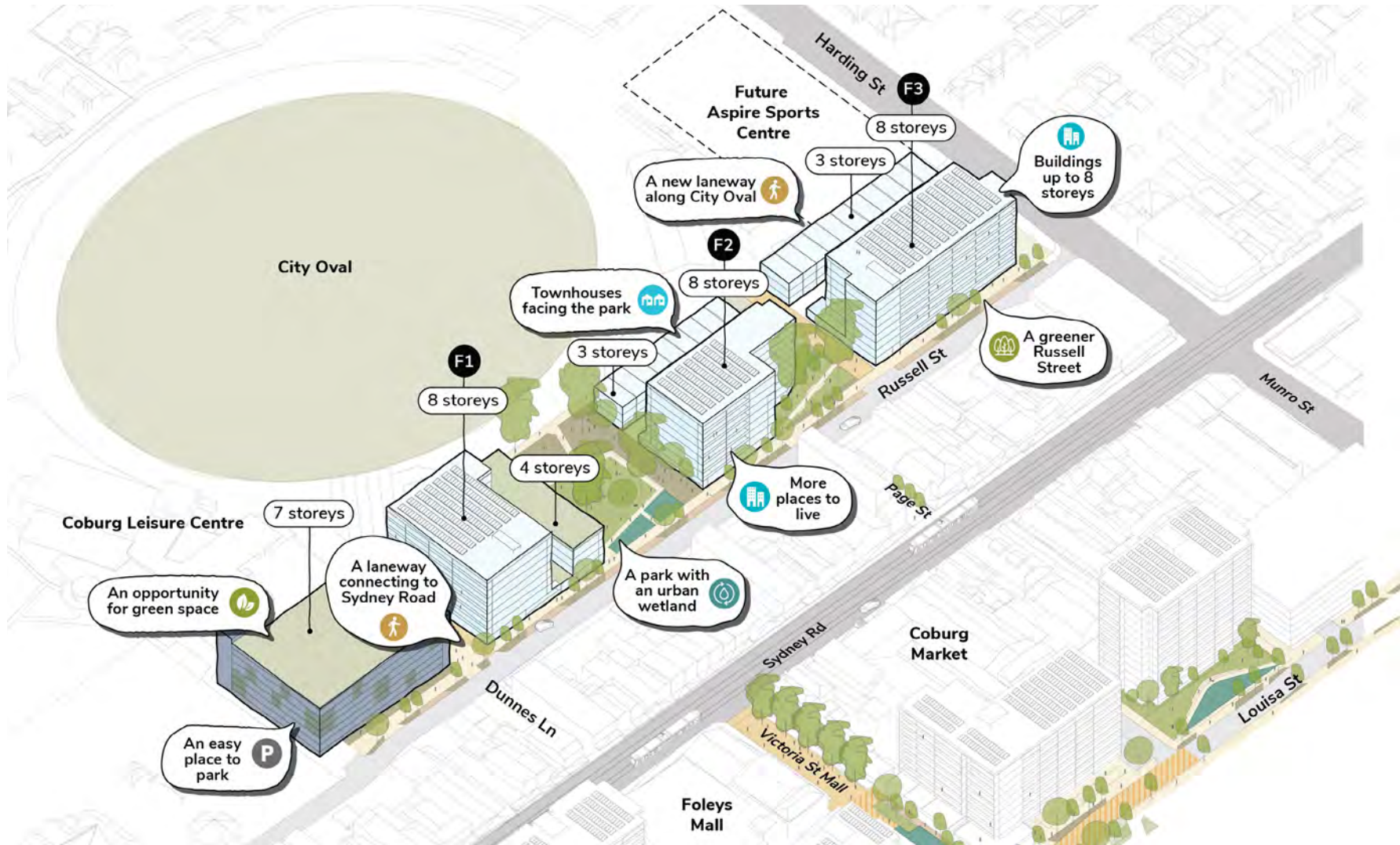
Building F2 will be a mix of 3-storey townhouses and 8-storey apartments. Many of the townhouses and apartments will have views to City Oval in the east, views to the neighbourhood park in the north and views to the linear park in the south.

Apartments and townhouses on Harding Street

Building F2 will be a mix of 3-storey townhouses and 8-storey apartments. Apartments to the north will have views to City Oval and the linear park.

Conveniently located public parking

Existing public parking will be relocated into a well-designed 7-storey multi-deck car park opposite the Coburg Leisure Centre. The building will integrate greening and be carefully designed to respond to its surroundings, contributing positively to the street. It will be within convenient walking distance of key destinations, including Coburg Primary School, City Oval, Sydney Road and the future Aspire Centre.



Site F. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

The plan for each site > Site F

A LONG-TERM PLAN

❖ Staging development



Aerial view of central Coburg, looking towards Coburg Station.

A long-term plan

Staging development

This is a long-term plan, with projects to be delivered in stages over 10-15 years. This improves the financial feasibility of the project, and allows interim impacts such as disruption from construction, such as access to parking, to be carefully managed.

Public realm upgrades are also staged, to make sure they align with the development of nearby sites. This means upgraded streets won't be damaged when sites are developed.



View along Victoria Street Mall looking towards Sydney Road. Photo by Simon Auber.

The plan is to deliver in six stages and the first stage, the library and piazza, is already underway.

The stages are indicative and are subject to change over time. Future Council decisions regarding staging will consider external factors such as market conditions, partnerships, funding availability for social and affordable housing, and site assembly involving the small number of properties Council does not currently own. At each stage of development, we will undertake traffic and parking studies to effectively manage impacts during both construction and post-construction phases.

Stage 1

Concept designs for the new library and piazza were revealed in early 2026 with further design refinement underway after community engagement. It is anticipated the new library will open in 2029.

We will undertake works to improve the public car parking on Waterfield Street and include an interim walk to connect Coburg Station to Waterfield Street and Victoria Street Mall.

Stage 2

A new community mixed-use site, led by a community organisation(s) to complement the existing churches and the new library and piazza. We will also undertake works to improve the quality of the public car park at this stage to improve amenity and maximise the number of spaces available.

Stage 3

A new mixed-use building on the former library site and upgrades to Victoria Street and Waterfield Street. Victoria Street Mall upgrades and a new laneway. This building is identified for social and affordable housing.

Stage 4

A new multi-deck car park with integrated community uses, residential building fronting a new pocket park, a new laneway connecting to Coburg Market and upgrades to Louisa Street. This building is identified for social and affordable housing.

Stage 5

New mixed-use buildings next to Coburg Station, a supermarket, more shops and housing. New laneways and a new multi-deck car park for public use with integrated community uses.

Stage 6

New mixed-use buildings with a new urban courtyard and a new neighbourhood park with integrated urban wetland. New housing options including townhouses by the City Oval.

What's next?

Now that there is a vision for central Coburg, we will prepare a business case to determine a delivery strategy and support future investment decisions. The business case will guide the feasibility and staging of the overall project.

As well as progressing with the new library and piazza, the second stage will be a new community mixed-use site to the west of the new library. To achieve this, we will soon commence a process to identify a suitable organisation(s) to develop and operate the site.



Potential staging. Indicative image by MGS Architects.



CENTRAL COBURG

Development
Standards



June 2026

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Introduction

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Coburg. We are grateful for their care of this Country and for the ongoing contributions of all First Nations communities to present day Coburg.

The purpose of the Development Standards is to implement the Precinct Framework and create confidence and clarity for development partners, Council officers, design teams, and the community.

The Central Coburg Precinct Framework establishes a coordinated vision for six sites and key streets within the Coburg Activity Centre. Anchored by a new library and piazza, central Coburg brings old and new together as a thriving and welcoming place. Council land unlocks lasting public value - strengthening community life, supporting local jobs and enterprise, enhancing open space, and enabling high-quality housing, including social and affordable homes.

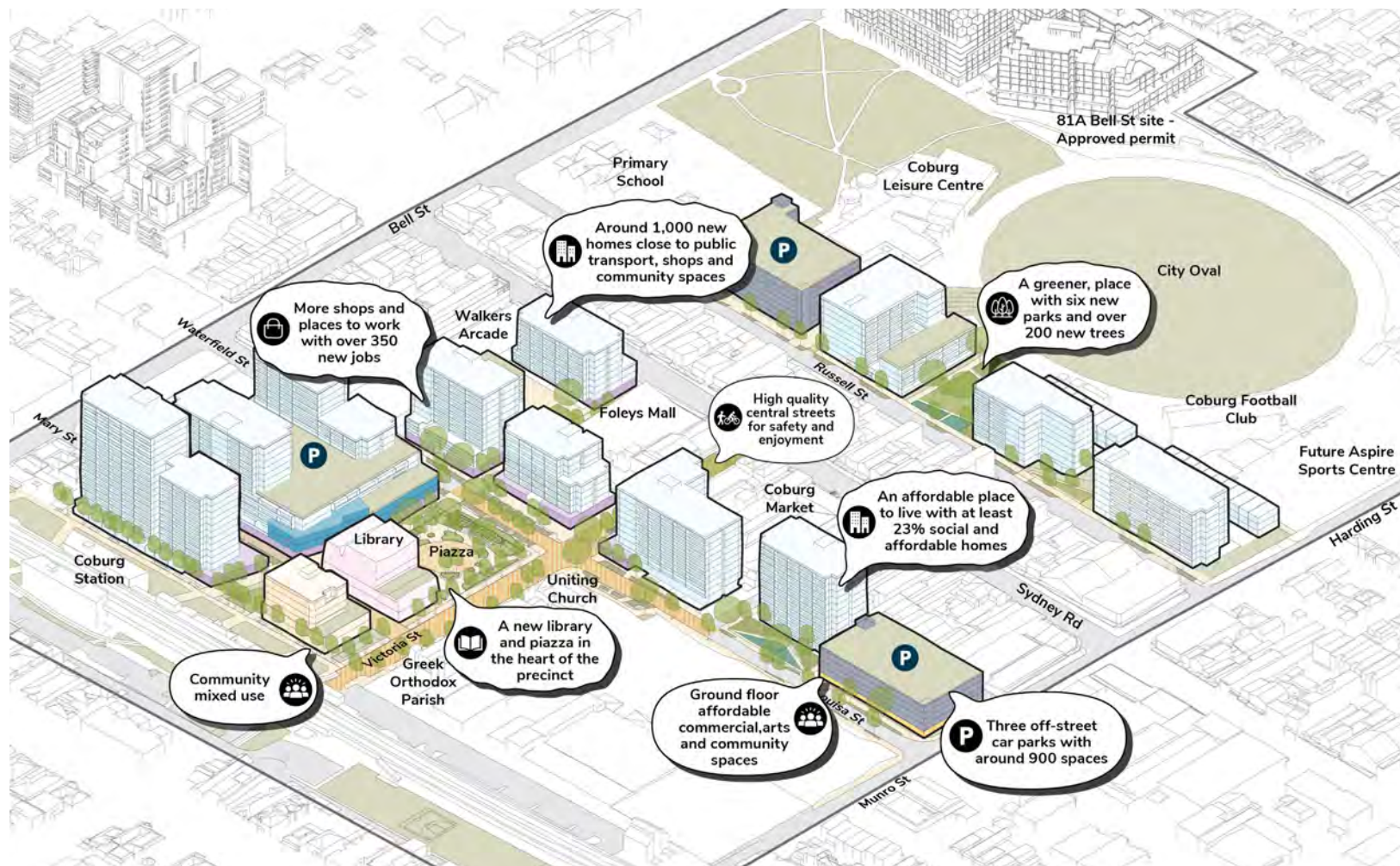
The purpose of the Development Standards is to implement the Precinct Framework and create confidence and clarity for development partners, Council officers, design teams, and the community.

Why have development standards?

Central Coburg seeks to achieve design excellence through collaborative design processes, high-quality architectural and public realm outcomes, and environmentally responsible development. This guide encourages proposals to contribute positively to the precinct, respond to site context and demonstrate innovation in sustainable outcomes.

High-quality development outcomes ensure that new developments:

- > Protect and strengthen Coburg's local character and cultural identity.
- > Provide appropriate housing and enhance social connection.
- > Deliver comfortable and safe public spaces and streets.
- > Enhance environmental performance and climate resilience.
- > Support a thriving local economy and vibrant community life.
- > Create buildings that are adaptable and durable over time.
- > Well-designed developments contribute to community wellbeing, support investment certainty and reduce long-term maintenance and environmental costs.



An updated framework for central Coburg. Indicative image by MGS Architects.

The guide is designed to support consistent, high-quality outcomes while allowing flexibility for innovative design responses.

Best-practice design process

Early and coordinated design is essential to achieving the outcomes sought by the Precinct Framework and this guide. Before commencing detailed design, proponents are encouraged to:

1. Establish an appropriate design team

Projects should be led by suitably qualified and experienced professionals, typically including:

- > Architects
- > Urban planners
- > Urban designers
- > Landscape architects
- > Sustainability and ESD consultants
- > Traffic and movement consultants
- > Integrated Water Management specialists
- > Social planner

2. Undertake early design testing

Proponents should test proposals against:

- > Precinct Framework
- > Development Standards
- > Merri-bek Planning Scheme
- > Council vision and strategic plans, and other adopted policies, plans, and strategies where relevant and applicable

3. Engage early with Council

Early engagement with Council is required to confirm expectations and identify key design issues before detailed design progresses.

4. Demonstrate integrated design

Development proposals should demonstrate an integrated response to context, built form, interface design, land use, ESD, public realm, and adhere to minimum site-specific requirements.

Maintaining best-practice

Prior to commencing design & procurement for public realm and development projects, the Development Standards will be reviewed and refined (if required).

The guide is intended to be used by:

- > Development partners
- > Council officers
- > Design and urban planning teams
- > Community and stakeholders

This guide should be read alongside the Central Coburg Precinct Framework and relevant planning controls.



Narrm Ngarrgu by Six Degrees. Photo by Dan Preston of Split Milk, courtesy of City of Melbourne.

How to use the guide?

The guide is structured in three parts:

A – General standards

Provides overarching design principles and requirements that apply across all development sites and streets. These set expectations for context, built form, interfaces, land use, ESD, and public realm.

B – Public realm standards

Provides detailed design guidance for key public spaces, including streets, laneways, and open spaces, to support consistent, high-quality public realm outcomes across the precinct.

C – Site standards

Provides site-specific standards and minimum requirements to inform an integrated response to context, built form, interface design, land use, movement and access, ESD, and public realm.

Proponents are expected to demonstrate that their proposals meet the minimum requirements of this guide and, where possible, respond to aspirational design outcomes. Alternative design responses may be supported where they demonstrate equal or superior outcomes.

Council acknowledges the work of MGS Architects and GLAS Landscape Architects in the preparation of development standards. Artist’s impressions prepared by Narrative.

A - GENERAL STANDARDS

- ❖ Context
- ❖ Built form
- ❖ Interfaces
- ❖ Land use
- ❖ Public realm
- ❖ ESD



38 Albermarle Street Kensington by Assemble and Fieldwork. Photo by Tom Ross.

Context

Ensure development responds directly to central Coburg's local character, community, and public spaces, supporting a safe, lively, and connected precinct.

Standards

Context response

- > Provide a clear urban context analysis that demonstrates how the proposal responds to surrounding built form, key streets, public spaces and landmarks.
- > Demonstrate how the design responds and builds on the specific character and function of key adjoining streets and landmarks.

Siting and orientation

- > Site and orient buildings to minimise overshadowing of key public spaces, streets, and neighbouring properties.
- > Orient buildings to maximise solar access to living areas, communal and public spaces, and minimise heat gain from western sun.
- > Provide generous setbacks, where appropriate, to support tree planting, greening, and outdoor seating.

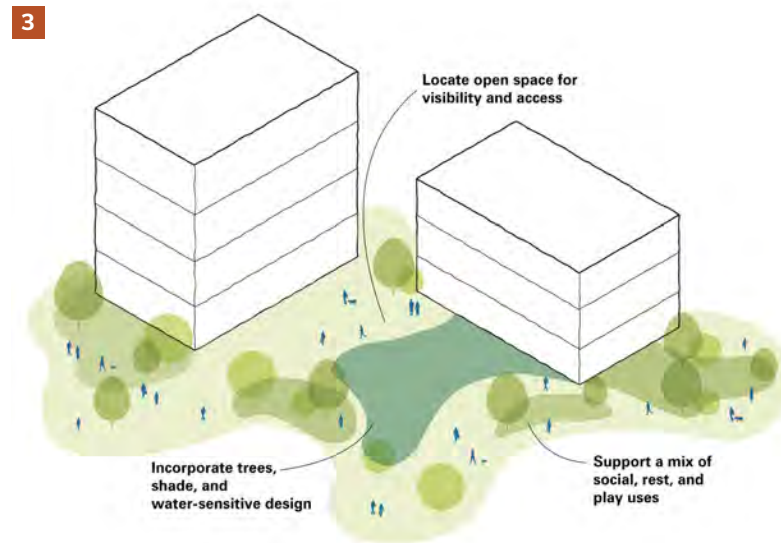
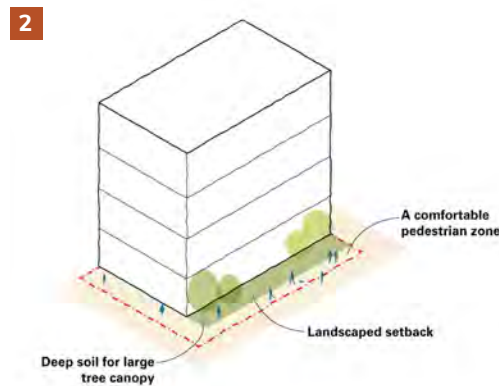
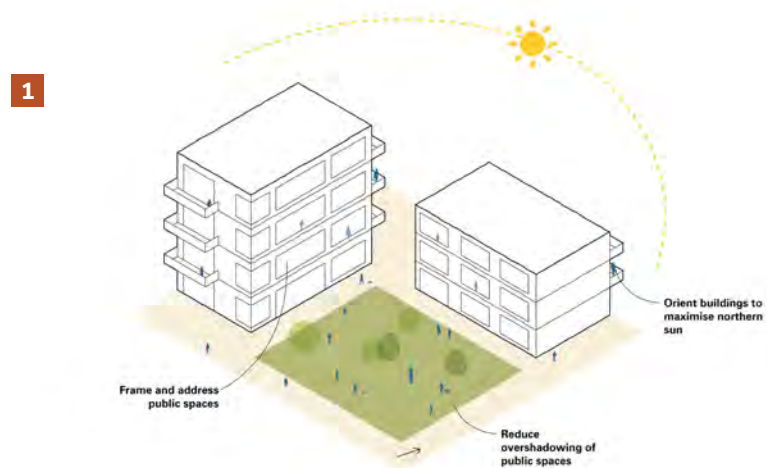
- > Ensure buildings address streets and frame public spaces directly, avoiding blank or inactive edges.
- > Locate open spaces where they are visible, accessible, and have direct access from the surrounding streets and development.
- > Ensure open spaces are overlooked by active uses designed using CPTED principles and apply a gender lens to support safety.
- > Prepare and implement a Construction Management Plan that minimises disruption to neighbouring residents and businesses.

Reference documents

- > Merri-bek Open Space Strategy
- > Gender Equality Statement of Commitment
- > Central Coburg First Nations Cultural Narratives

Aspirations

- > Protect and frame key views, landmarks, and culturally significant places, and embed design elements that connect to local identity.
- > Respond to key arrival points, including Coburg Station, by creating strong visual markers, clear sightlines, and legible connections that enhance orientation and sense of arrival.
- > Reinforce the precinct as a commercial heart that complements Sydney Road's existing trade and activity.



1) Siting and orientation 2) Landscape opportunities 3) Open space quality

Built form

Shape building form and massing to create a coherent, human-scaled streetscape that supports environmental amenity, sunlight, and an active public realm.

Standards

Height and massing

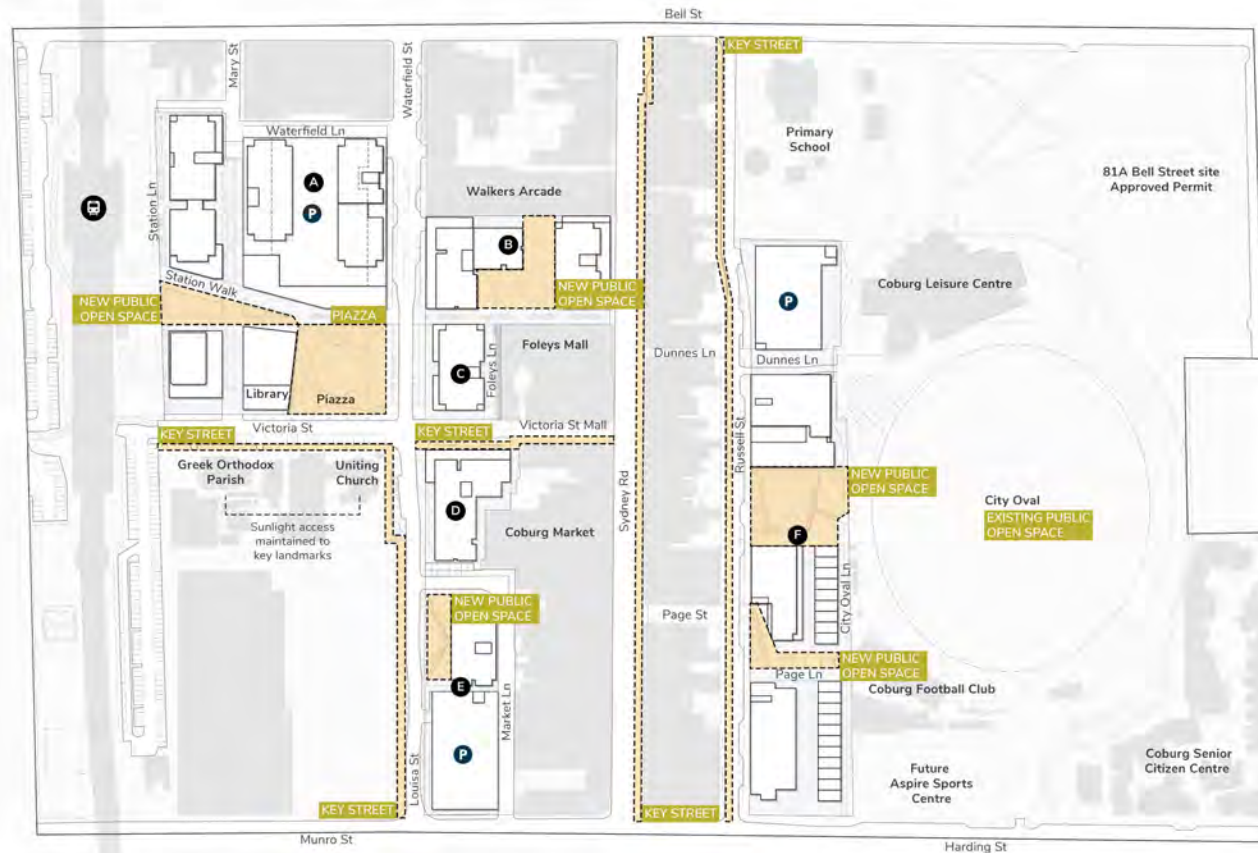
- > Provide a street wall that responds to the surrounding existing and emerging context, including appropriate transitions in height and scale and well-resolved parapet design, to define a coherent, human-scale street environment.
- > Set upper levels back above the street wall to reduce visual bulk and maintain a clear distinction between lower and upper building elements.
- > Transition building height down toward sensitive interfaces, including lower-scale areas along Sydney Road and new and existing public spaces.
- > Ensure buildings contribute to a varied, interesting and visually engaging skyline.

Sunlight access

- > Protect sunlight access to key public spaces, streets, and communal areas in accordance with the standards set out in Table 1.

Public space	Sunlight access requirement
Piazza	Provide a minimum of 2 hours of direct sunlight between 10 am and 2 pm on 21 June, with no more than 50% of the space in shadow at any time during this period.
Existing public open space	No additional overshadowing beyond the theoretical shadow cast by a building podium envelope between 10 am and 2 pm on 21 June.
New public open space	Provide a minimum of 2 hours of direct sunlight between 10 am and 2 pm on 22 September, with no more than 50% of the space in shadow at any time during this period.
Key pedestrian streets Sydney Road, Victoria Street Mall, Victoria Street, Louisa Street, Russell Street	No additional overshadowing to the opposite footpath measured at least 5 metres from the property boundary between 10 am and 2 pm on 22 September.

Table 1: Sunlight access requirements for public spaces



Solar access map

A - General standards > Built form

Demonstrate that development achieves acceptable wind comfort and safety outcomes for intended uses supported by wind impact assessments.

Standards

Wind mitigation

- > Design building massing and form to minimise downwash and wind acceleration at ground level, including the use of articulated podiums, upper-level setbacks, and chamfered or rounded corners to reduce corner acceleration and wind tunnelling effects.
- > Incorporate façade articulation and building elements (e.g., recessed and projecting balconies, façade depth, canopies, awnings, and overhangs) to disrupt downdrafts and improve wind comfort at street level.
- > Select and locate wind-resilient tree species and planting in areas of higher wind exposure to support long-term landscape performance.
- > Demonstrate that development achieves acceptable wind comfort and safety outcomes for intended uses (e.g. sitting, standing, walking), supported by wind impact assessments.

Visual diversity

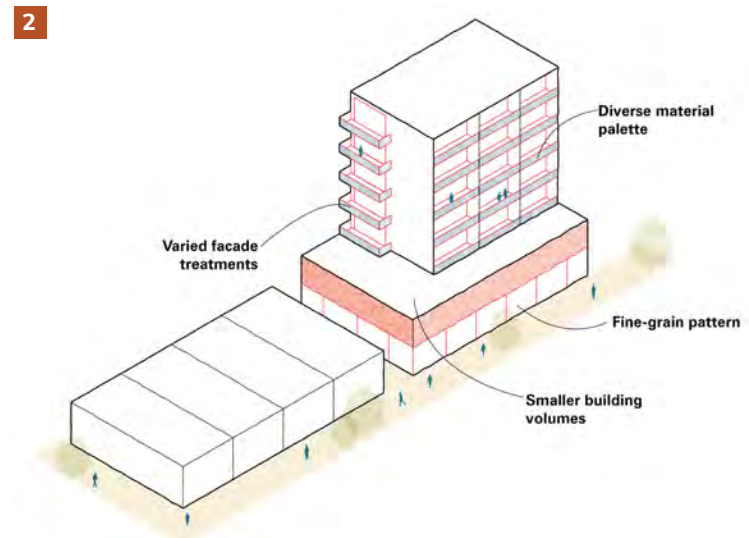
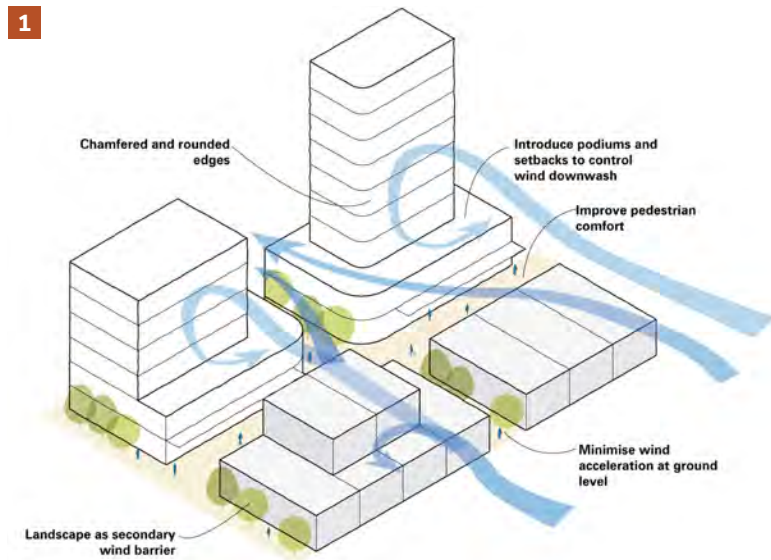
- > Maintain clear primary building forms, using secondary elements such as balconies, shading devices, and façade detailing to provide variation and respond to the rhythm and scale of the street.
- > Clearly define tenancies, with frequent entrances, and a consistent structural rhythm that supports fine-grained active frontages.
- > Use a palette of materials, colours, and façade treatments that reinforce the diversity and identity of different buildings, streets and sub-precincts.

Reference documents

- > Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy

Aspirations

- > For large development sites, engage multiple architects or demonstrate an equivalent design approach to deliver distinct building form expressions and avoid a single, uniform architectural outcome.
- > Deliver landmark quality design on prominent or gateway sites, including locations adjacent to Coburg Station, the Piazza, and key public spaces.
- > Assess and resolve cumulative wind impacts, including interactions with existing buildings and future development identified in the Central Coburg Precinct Framework.



1) Wind mitigation 2) Visual diversity

Interfaces

Deliver building interfaces that activate central Coburg's streets, laneways, and public spaces, support safe and comfortable pedestrian movement, and are adaptable over time.

Standards

Ground floor design

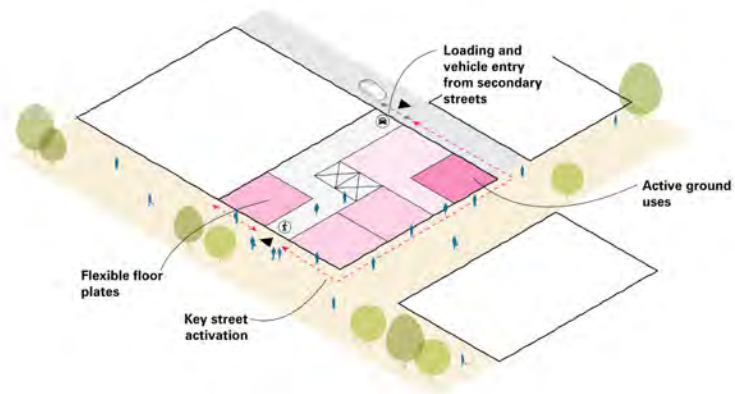
- > Provide active ground floor uses along key streets and public spaces, including Station Walk, Victoria Street Mall, Waterfield Street and Sydney Road, and extending around corners into secondary streets and laneways to improve visibility, activation, and passive surveillance.
- > Design ground floors with a fine-grain pattern of tenancies, avoiding expansive inactive frontages.
- > Ensure ground floors have sufficient height and depth to support flexible and adaptable uses over time.
- > Building services should be designed as integrated high quality architectural elements
- > Locate building services, loading, and back-of-house functions away from primary street frontages.

- > Provide weather protection, such as awnings and canopies, along Station Walk, Victoria Street Mall, Waterfield Street and Sydney Road.
- > Design building edges as active thresholds between public and private space, integrating outdoor dining, seating, and spill-out spaces, especially along primary street frontages, including Station Walk, Victoria Street Mall and Sydney Road.
- > Create depth at the ground floor through colonnades, or layered façades to enhance comfort, weather protection, and visual richness.

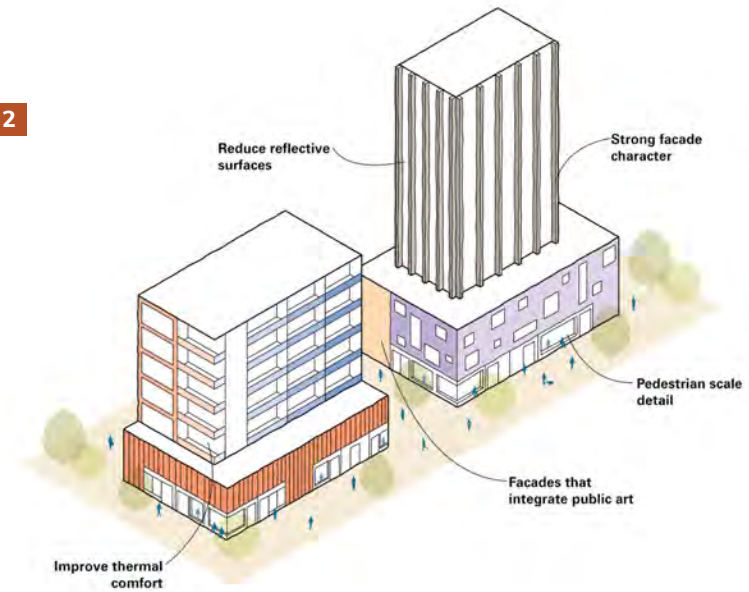
Facade design

- > Design façades with a clear hierarchy of detail, using simpler materials and expression at upper levels, and greater richness, texture, and fine-grain detailing at the pedestrian level to enhance visual interest at street level.
- > Limit glazing and reflective materials, particularly on east and west façades, to reduce glare, manage solar gain, and improve thermal comfort.
- > Integrate balconies, planting and shading devices to provide depth and shadow in the facade and create visual interest.

1



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1) Ground floor design 2) Facade design

A - General standards > Interfaces

Deliver building interfaces that activate central Coburg's streets, laneways, and public spaces, support safe and comfortable pedestrian movement, and are adaptable over time.

Standards

Sense of entry

- > Provide well-defined building entrances that are visible from the street.
- > Design entrances to be highly visible from the street, safe, well-lit, weather-protected and connected to streets and public spaces.
- > Define retail entrances through architectural expression, including changes in form, material, detailing and integrated signage.

Passive surveillance

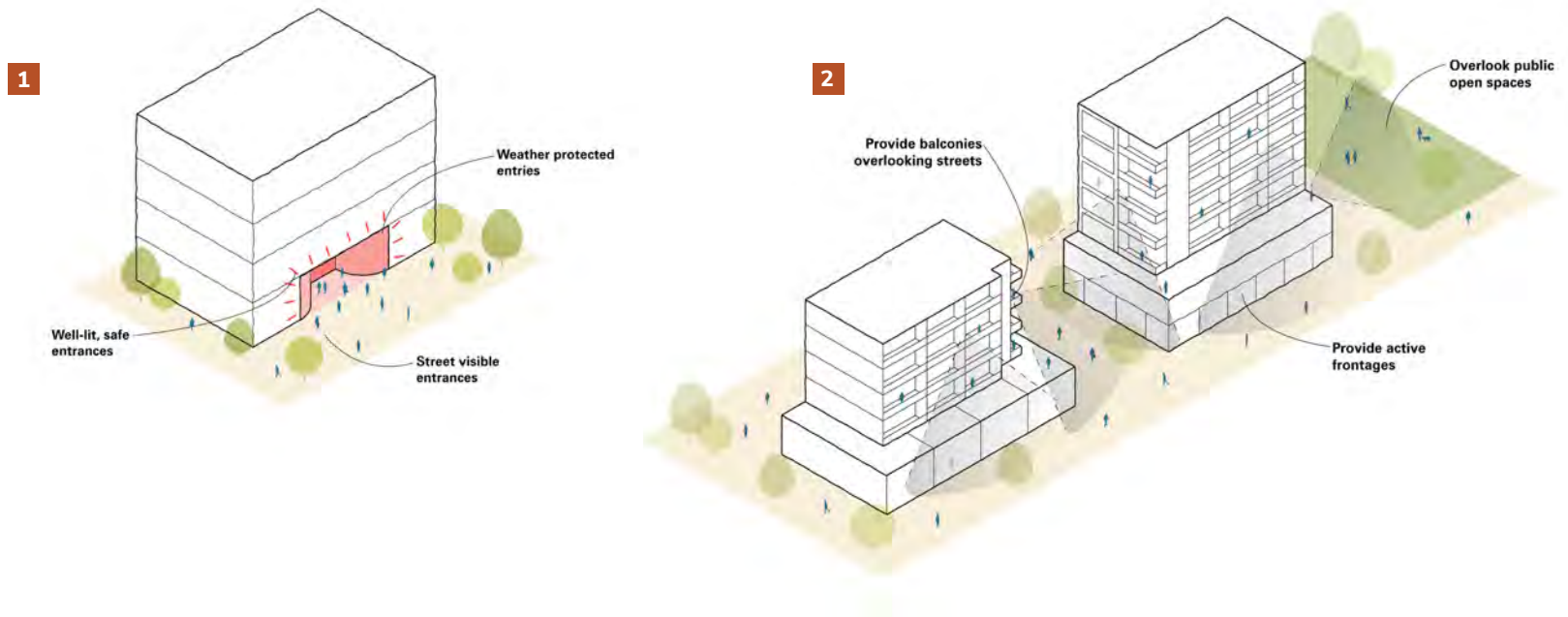
- > Maximise overlooking of streets, parks, and public spaces through active frontages, windows, and balconies.
- > Minimise inactive edges and avoid secluded or hidden spaces along all public interfaces and pedestrian routes.

Reference documents

- > Merri-bek Good Design Advice Sheets
- > Merri-bek Streets for People Plan
- > Merri-bek Public Art Policy
- > Merri-bek Sustainable Buildings Policy

Aspirations

- > Locate larger, family-oriented dwellings with direct overlook of adjacent public open spaces to support informal child supervision and everyday use.
- > Incorporate opportunities for public art and local expression on prominent façades.
- > Maximise the activation of ground floors throughout the precinct to support passive surveillance and a sense of safety throughout the day and evening.



1) Sense of entry 2) Passive surveillance

Land use

Provide a diverse mix of housing, employment, and commercial uses that support an inclusive, adaptable, and economically thriving central Coburg.

Standards

Adaptability

- > Provide generous floor-to-floor heights, particularly on lower levels, and efficient structural grids, and building services that support conversion between different uses.
- > Design tenancies and building layouts that allow easy subdivision and consolidation for reconfiguration over time in response to changing needs.
- > Design buildings to accommodate future changes in transport, technology, and community needs, including evolving servicing requirements, reduced car dependence, and new forms of work and retail.

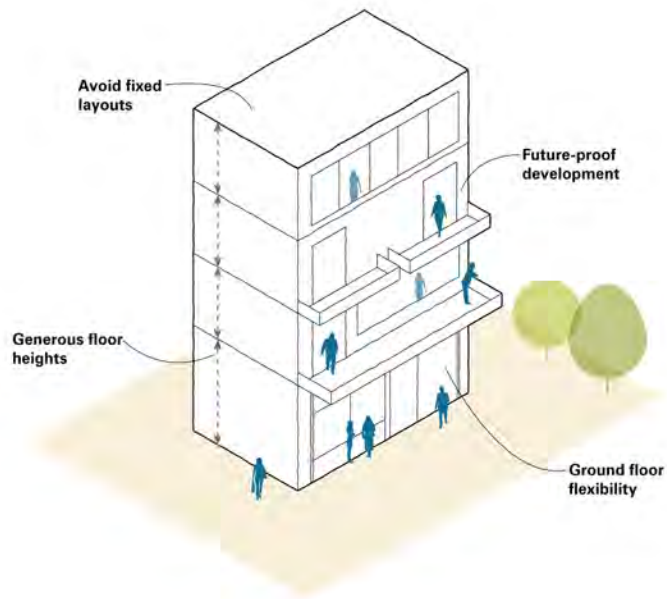
Dwelling mix

- > Provide a diverse mix of dwelling types in various sizes and adaptable floor plans to allow for the combination of multiple apartments into larger apartments to support larger household types (e.g. multi-generational households).
- > Design dwellings to support ageing in place, including step-free access, adaptable layouts, and accessible entries.
- > Design family-friendly housing that supports all life stages, incorporating flexible layouts, safe outdoor spaces, and views to communal open spaces.

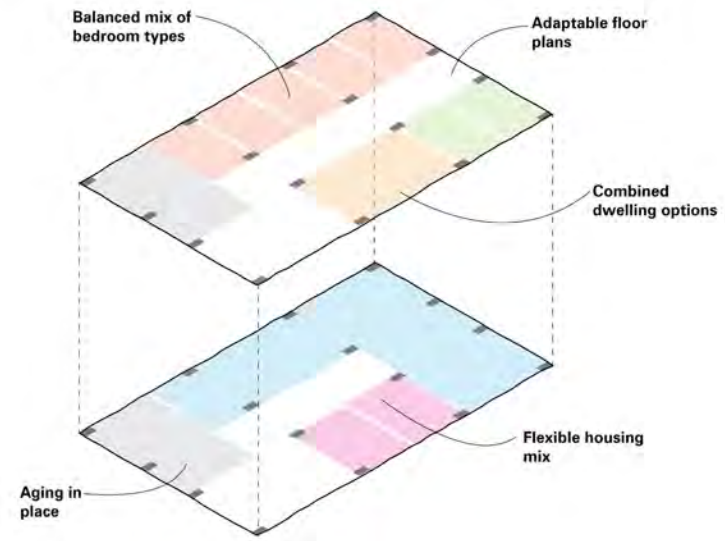


North Richmond Social Housing by Kerstin Thompson Architects and Hayball. Photo by Leo Showell.

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1) Adaptability 2) Dwelling mix

Deliver flexible commercial spaces that can accommodate a mix of retail, food and beverage, office, health, and other service-based uses to support a diverse local economy.

Standards

Multi-storey parking

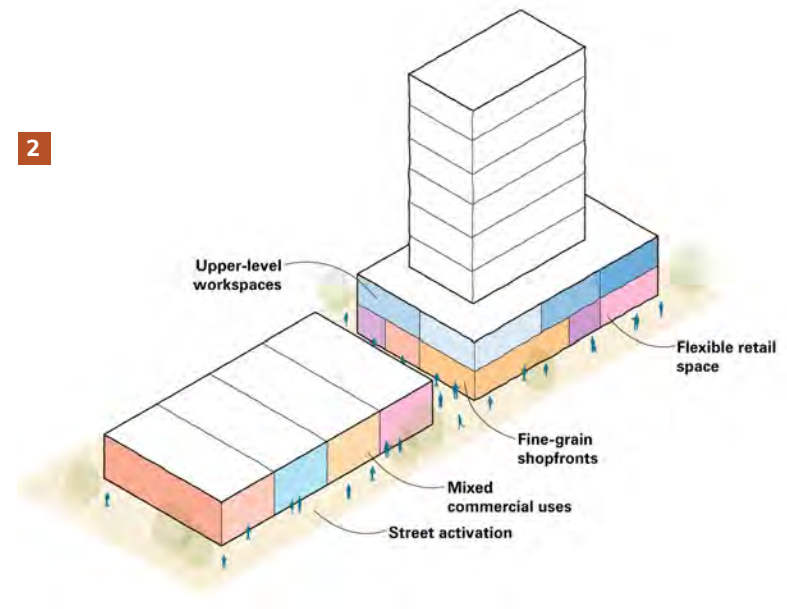
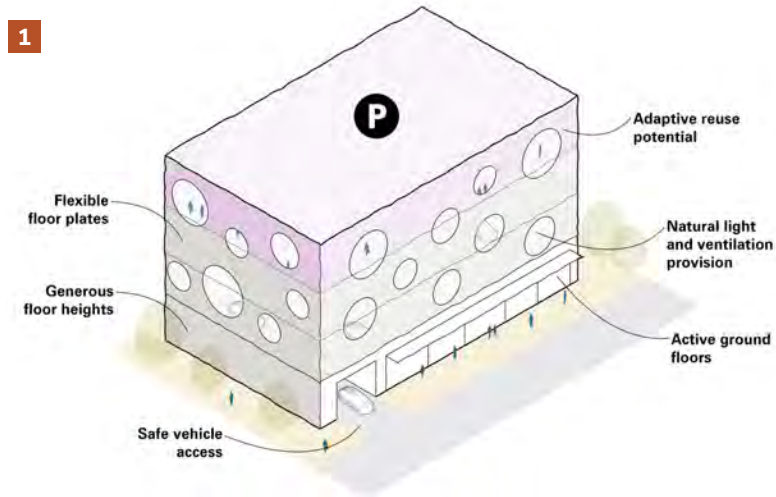
- > Locate vehicle access and design entries to minimise conflict with pedestrians and cyclists.
- > Design façades of parking structures to integrate with surrounding development, using screening, articulation, landscaping/vertical greening and materials that avoid exposed decks.
- > Design adaptable parking structures to enable future conversion through level floor plates, generous floor-to-floor heights, simple structural grids, and planning for the provision of natural light and ventilation.
- > Locate and design car park access points (lifts, stairs, escalators) to connect directly to the public realm, supporting street activation and avoiding internalised circulation.
- > Design parking to support electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Commercial uses

- > Deliver flexible commercial spaces that can accommodate a mix of retail, food and beverage, office, health, and other service-based uses to support a diverse local economy.
- > Locate employment generating uses, including offices, flexible workspaces, and studios, to upper levels and secondary streets, enabling retail uses to be prioritised at ground level and along primary streets.



Multi-deck carpark in Copenhagen, Park 'n' Play by JAJA Architects. Photo by Katherine Sundermann.



Contribute to delivering a precinct-wide target of 23–30% social and affordable housing, both integrated with market housing and in stand-alone social and affordable housing buildings.

Standards

Social and affordable housing

- > Deliver social and affordable housing in accordance with State definitions under Section 3AA of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 or equivalent definitions in Commonwealth regulations and programs. (Refer: Planning and Environment Act 1987, s3AA)
- > Contribute to delivering a precinct-wide target of 23–30% social and affordable housing, both integrated with market housing and in stand-alone social and affordable housing buildings.
- > Provide a minimum of 10% affordable housing across all development sites.
- > Maximise provision of social housing on appropriately identified social and affordable housing sites, with a focus on very-low and low-income households.

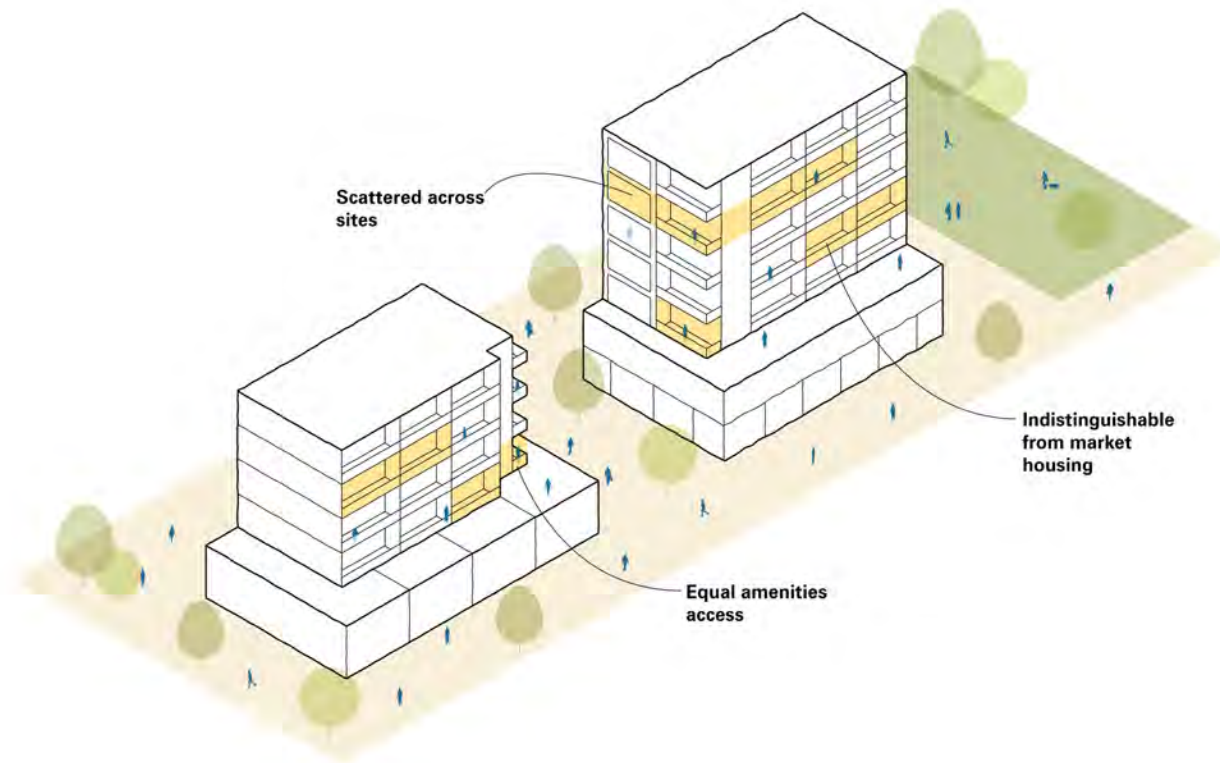
- > Ensure affordable housing is integrated throughout developments and is of comparable quality and equal access to entrances, sunlight, open space, and building amenities.
- > Ensure social and affordable housing is retained in the longer term, managed by either Homes Victoria or a registered housing provider or equivalent Not-for-Profit entity, unless otherwise agreed by Council.

Reference documents

- > Central Coburg Housing Needs Analysis
- > Merri-bek Affordable Housing Action Plan
- > Moving Around Merri-bek
- > Merri-bek Parking Management Policy

Aspirations

- > Exceed 23% minimum social and affordable housing target.
- > Deliver a balanced mix of bedroom types across developments, with at least 40% of dwellings provided as three or four-bedroom units to support larger households.
- > Provide affordable and flexible commercial spaces to support small businesses, creative industries, local enterprise and community groups.
- > Ensure tenancies fronting key commercial streets can support a range of food and beverage uses, including commercial kitchen infrastructure (e.g. exhaust flues, grease traps, and servicing connections).



1) Social and affordable housing

Public realm

Deliver a lively and welcoming public realm that builds on central Coburg's character, creating a strong sense of place through green, tree-lined streets and diverse public spaces.

Standards

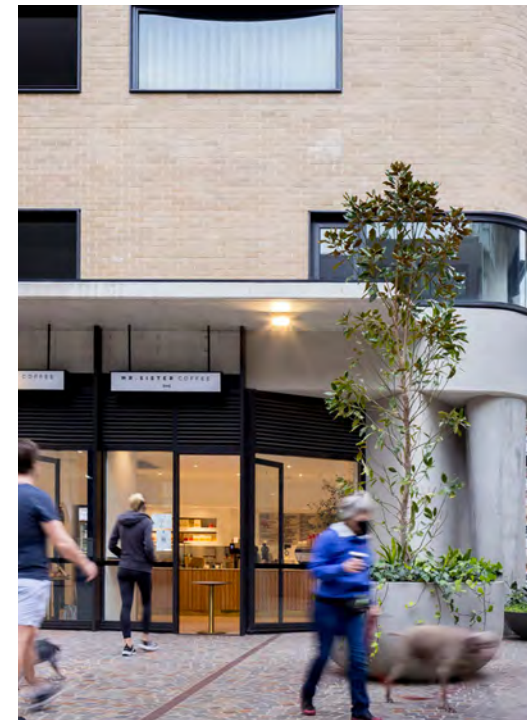
Identity and character

- > Embed cultural narratives into the design of all public realm spaces in accordance with the Central Coburg Cultural Narratives Report.
- > Deliver a cohesive, consistent and high-quality materials and furniture palette for the public realm of central Coburg in accordance with Merri-bek requirements, including Merri-bek Technical Notes, where appropriate. Materials should be durable, sustainable and distinctive.
- > Celebrate Coburg's cultural diversity and identity through the design of streets and public spaces, including opportunities for multicultural food, retail, and community expression.
- > Integrate public art, storytelling, and design elements into the public realm, working with artists and the Arts and Culture team to deliver both embedded and stand-alone artworks in accordance with Council policy.

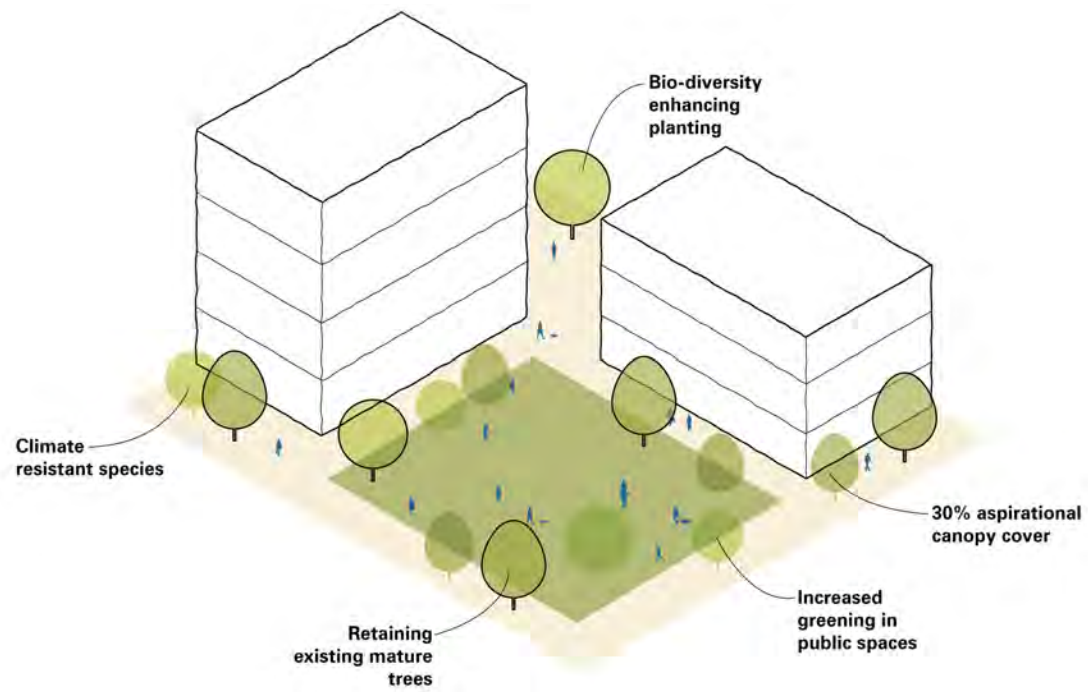
- > Public art commissions are to be delivered in accordance with the Merri-bek Public Art Policy and in consultation with the Arts and Culture Team.

Greening and biodiversity

- > Incorporate the principles of the Merri-bek Nature Plan to foster connection to nature and improve the contribution of the private and public realm to safeguarding and improving biodiversity.
- > Expand overall canopy cover across streets and public spaces and contribute to the overall minimum target for the public realm of 36% at 20 years (contribution of individual sites and spaces specified in Section B of the standards), prioritising retention of mature trees, and increasing deep soil to enable resilient tree canopy growth.



Newcastle East End by SBJ et al. Photo by Brett Boardman.



1) Greening and biodiversity

A - General standards > Public realm

Design streets as low-speed environments to support safe sharing and reduce conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.

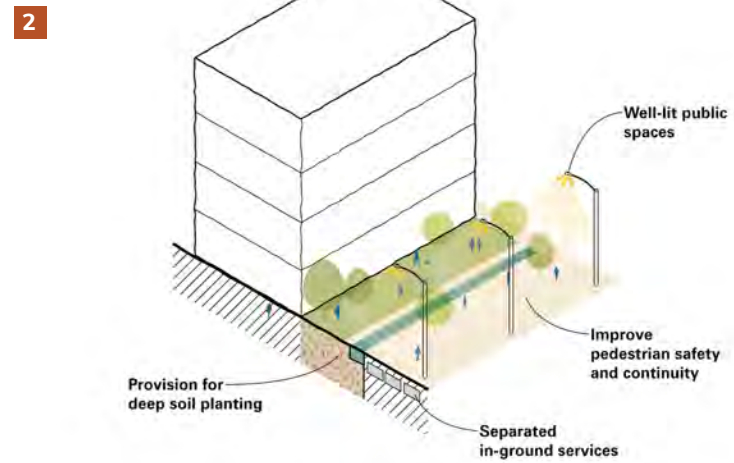
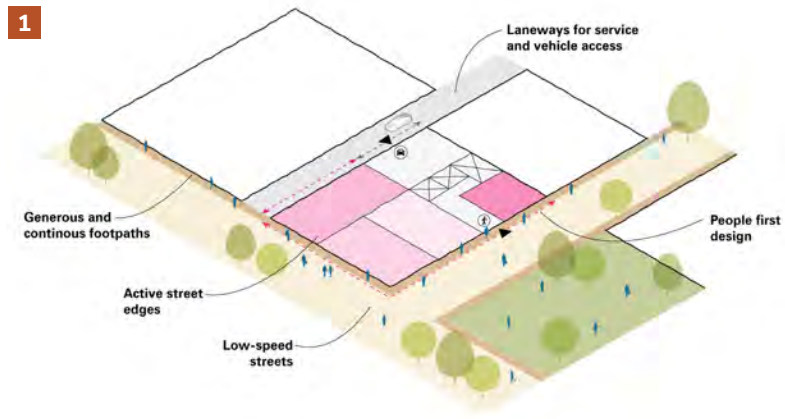
Standards

Movement and access

- > Design streets and public spaces in line with the Streets for People Framework, prioritising safe, accessible, and comfortable movement for pedestrians and cyclists, while accommodating necessary vehicle access.
 - > Design streets as low-speed environments (maximum 30 km/h) to support safe sharing and reduce conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.
 - > Provide generous, continuous and legible pedestrian and cycling routes that respond to key desire lines, destinations, and activity areas.
 - > Integrate lighting, clear sightlines, and active edges to support safety, wayfinding, and usability throughout the day and night.
- > Prioritise accessible and short-stay on-street parking at key destinations.
 - > Integrate servicing and loading to minimise disruption to the public realm, avoiding major pedestrian areas, limiting footpath crossovers, and allowing time-restricted loading where necessary.



38 Albermarle Street Kensington by Assemble and Fieldwork.
Photo by Tom Ross.



1) Movement and access 2) Infrastructure and services

A - General standards > Public realm

Remove redundant in-ground services and bundle new and existing services where possible to free up space for deep soil and tree planting.

Standards

Infrastructure and services

- > Plan and deliver infrastructure upgrades in coordination with general standards, ensuring streets and public spaces enable improved pedestrian conditions, deep soil planting, flood storage, and integrated WSUD.
- > Remove redundant in-ground services and bundle new and existing services where possible to free up space for deep soil and tree planting.
- > Deliver infrastructure upgrades in accordance with the Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study.

Reference documents

- > Central Coburg First Nations Cultural Narratives Report
- > Merri-bek Nature Plan
- > Urban Forest Strategy
- > Central Coburg Arborist Report
- > Merri-bek Public Art Policy
- > Merri-bek Technical Notes
- > Merri-bek Urban Forest Strategy
- > Merri-bek Open Space Strategy
- > Streets for People Plan
- > Moving Around Merri-bek
- > Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study

Aspirations

- > Increase overall canopy cover across streets and public spaces with an overall target of 40% at 20 years, supported by generous deep soil to deliver a resilient urban forest.
- > Work with artists to develop integrated art and commission artists to create stand-alone public artworks.
- > Deliver a connected and biodiverse landscape that supports habitat across canopy, mid-storey, and ground levels, contributing to broader ecological networks.
- > Provide safe, welcoming, and legible public realm at night through dark sky compliant lighting, supporting extended use and passive surveillance.



Russell Neighbourhood Park, looking towards City Oval. Indicative visualisation by Narratives.

Environmentally Sustainable Design

Deliver a net-zero, all-electric, climate-resilient development that maximises efficiency and renewable energy to reduce emissions and support a liveable central Coburg.

Standards

Energy performance

- > Deliver all-electric buildings that support a net-zero precinct outcome.
- > Design buildings to achieve high energy performance through passive design, including orientation, north and western shading, insulation, and building envelope performance.
- > Reduce embodied carbon through efficient structural design and the use of low-carbon and recycled materials.
- > Design buildings to achieve high indoor environmental quality, including good natural ventilation, daylight access, and thermal comfort through passive design measures.

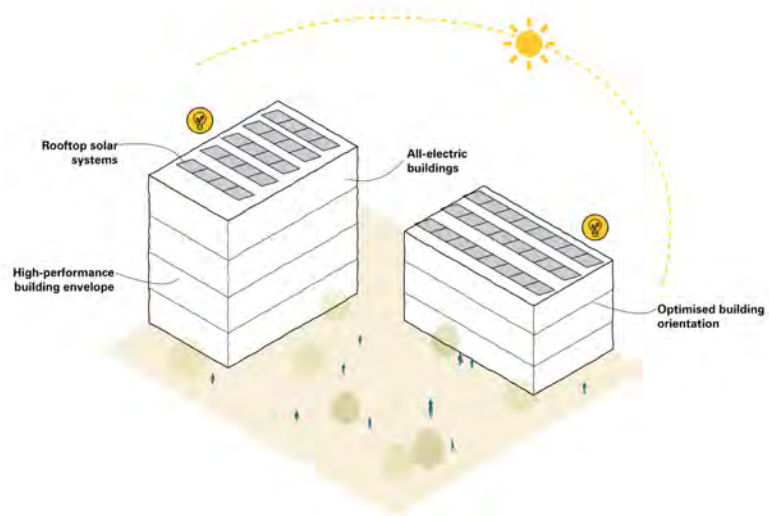
Transport and waste management

- > Provide conveniently located high-quality bicycle facilities, including secure parking, and end-of-trip facilities (such as showers and lockers) for workers.
- > Integrate electric vehicle charging infrastructure across developments, including within residential and commercial parking areas.

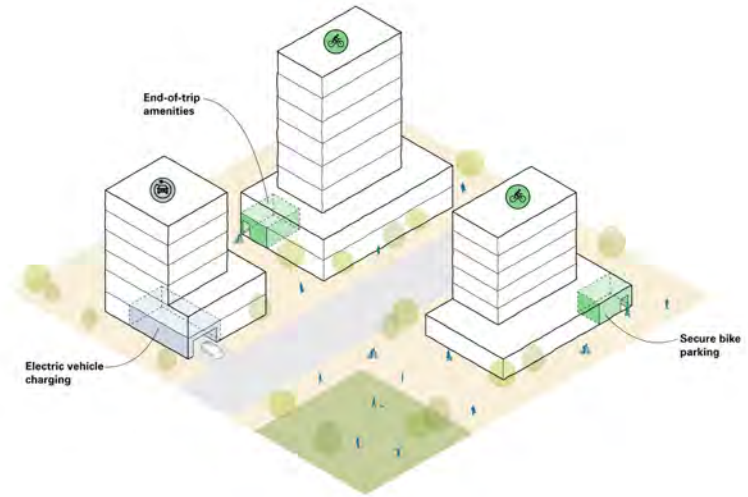
Circular economy

- > Support construction waste recycling to minimise landfill and recover valuable materials and encourage adaptive re-use of existing materials and structures.
- > Select materials that avoid harmful substances, such as those on the Living Building Challenge (LBC) red list.
- > Prioritise low-carbon materials to reduce the environmental impact of development.

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1) Energy performance 2) Transport and waste management

A - General standards > Environmentally sustainable design

Integrate flood storage within streets and public spaces to manage overland flow and contribute to the precinct-wide flood mitigation strategy.

Standards

Integrated water management

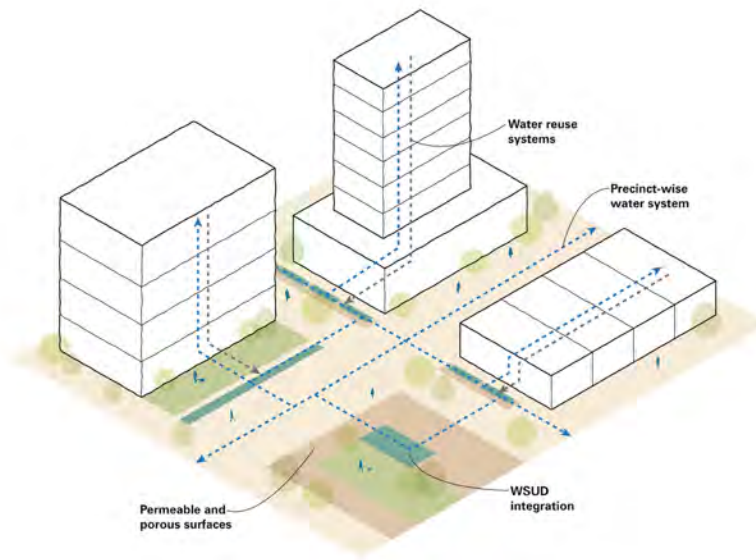
- > Align development with the Central Coburg Integrated Water Management Plan to deliver a coordinated, precinct-wide approach to stormwater, water reuse, and flood management across development sites and the public realm.
- > Integrate water sensitive urban design (WSUD) across streets, parks, and development, including wetlands, raingardens, tree pits, and permeable surfaces, to treat, convey, and store stormwater, achieving a minimum of 1,210m² of WSUD infrastructure across the precinct.
- > Maximise on-site water reuse and contribute to precinct-scale systems where feasible to significantly reduce reliance on potable water, supporting a transition towards greater water self-sufficient development.
- > Capture and reuse stormwater to reduce reliance on potable water, including roof water reuse for toilets (minimum first two levels and supported by water balance modelling).

- > Investigate opportunity for irrigation and wider precinct-scale reuse via the City Oval harvesting scheme.
- > Deliver stormwater treatment and flow management outcomes that respond to EPA Victoria Urban Stormwater Management Guidance (Publication 1739) and best practice environmental management objectives including 80% TSS reduction, 45% total phosphorus reduction, 45% total nitrogen reduction and 70% gross pollutant reduction.
- > Integrate flood storage within streets and public spaces (including WSUD systems and open space areas) to manage overland flow and contribute to the precinct-wide flood mitigation strategy.
- > Integrate water and landscape systems in streets and public realm design to provide shade and shelter, and support cooling and usability during extreme weather events.

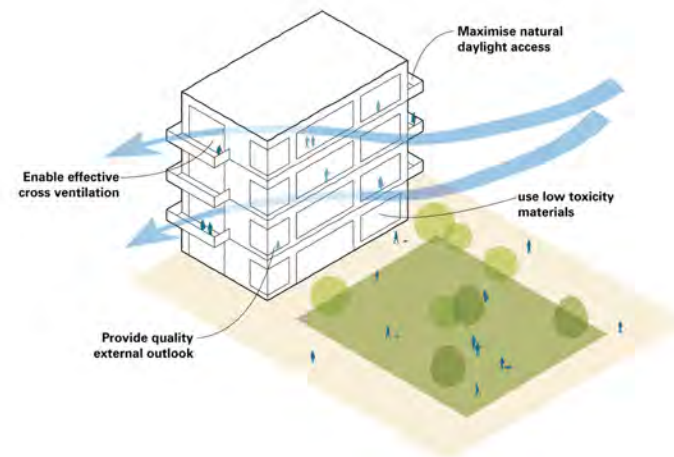
Indoor environmental quality

- > Provide high levels of natural daylight to all dwellings and non-residential spaces.
- > Design buildings to support natural and mechanical ventilation, including cross-ventilation in dwellings and operable openings where feasible.
- > Incorporate external shading, ceiling fans, and passive cooling measures to improve comfort and reduce energy use.
- > Use low-toxicity and low-VOC materials to support healthy indoor environments.

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1) Integrated water management 2) Indoor environmental quality

A - General standards > Environmentally sustainable design

Integrate planting that responds to local conditions and supports habitat for local species, including birds, pollinators, and other fauna.

Standards

Urban ecology

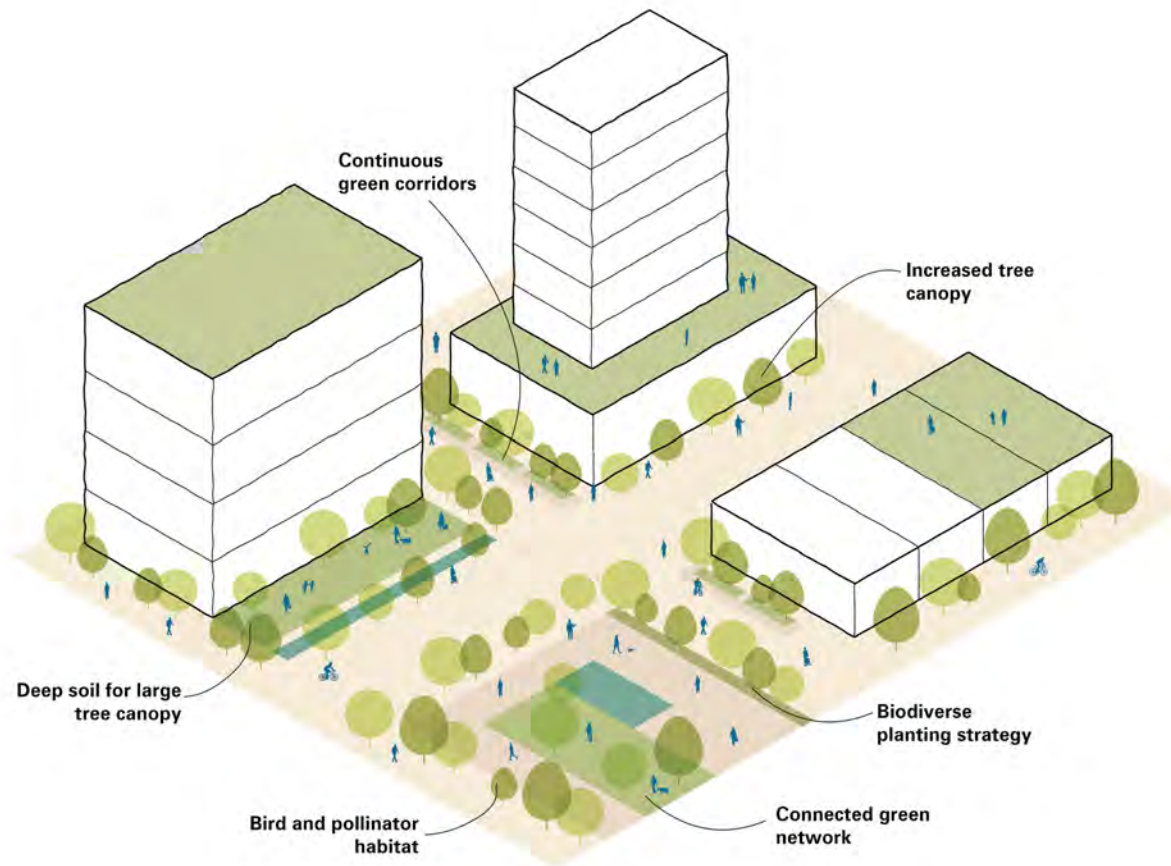
- > Deliver a continuous green network that links streets, open spaces, and development, providing shade, reducing urban heat, and creating comfortable pedestrian routes across the precinct.
- > Deliver large volume deep soil areas with access to sunlight to support large and healthy canopy trees.
- > Integrate planting that responds to local conditions and supports habitat for local species, including birds, pollinators, and other fauna, using a balanced mix of native, indigenous, and climate-resilient species.

Reference documents

- > Central Coburg Integrated Water Management Plan
- > South-Eastern-Councils WSUD Guidelines
- > Merri-bek Circular Economy Strategy Towards a Zero Waste Merri-bek
- > Central Coburg First Nations Cultural Narratives Report
- > Merri-bek Zero Carbon Action Plan
- > Merri-bek Streets for People Plan
- > Moving Around Merri-bek
- > Merri-bek Nature Plan
- > Urban Forest Strategy

Aspirations

- > Deliver climate positive development that goes beyond net zero by generating surplus renewable energy.
- > Contribute to or enable shared or precinct-scale energy systems, such as embedded networks, shared solar, or battery storage, to improve efficiency and resilience.
- > Deliver measurable biodiversity gains, including habitat creation, increased species diversity, and contribution to broader ecological networks beyond the site.
- > Provide a recycling hub to enable effective ongoing resource recovery for residents.



Urban ecology



View along Station Walk looking towards the former Coburg Station. Indicative visualisation by Narrative.

B- Public realm standards

36

B - PUBLIC REALM STANDARDS

- ❖ Streets & laneways
- ❖ Public spaces



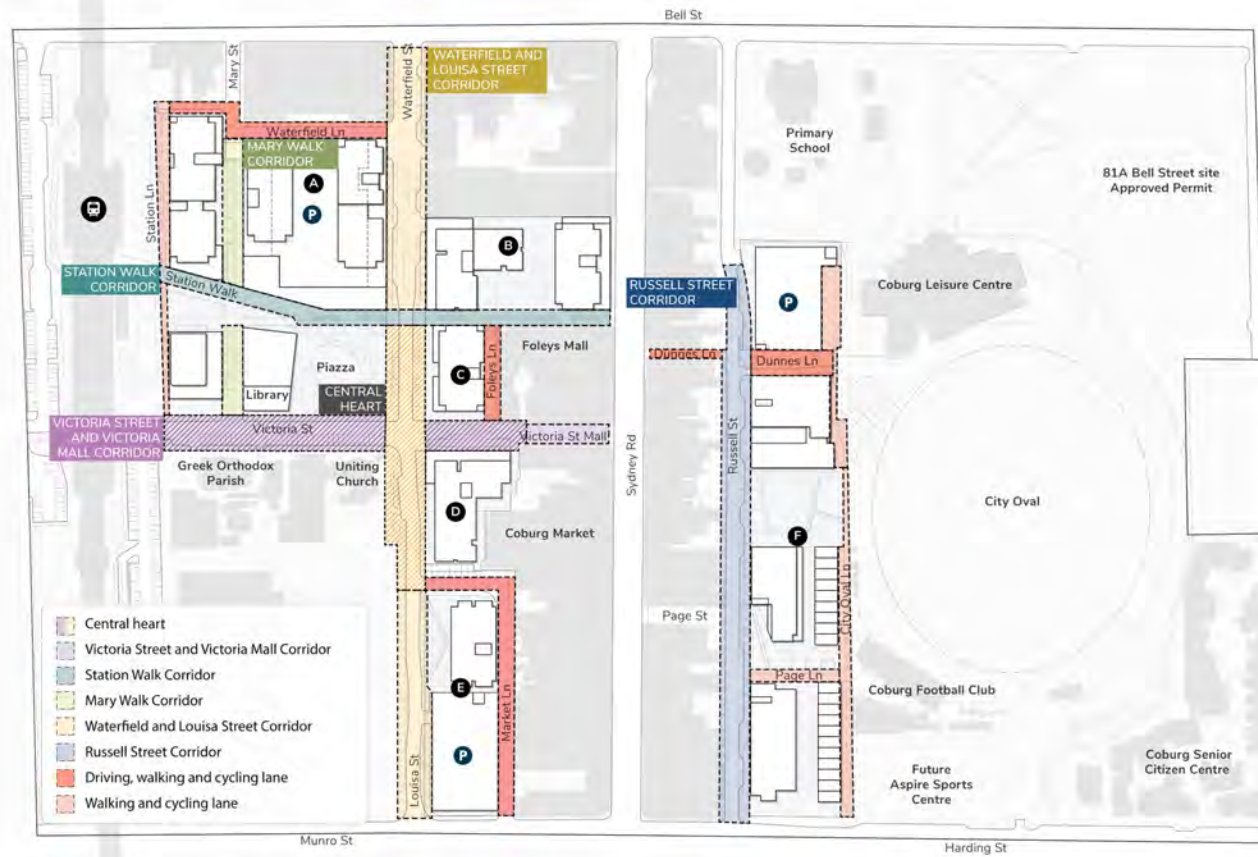
9 Wilson Ave Brunswick by Neometro. Photo by Michael Pham.

Streets and laneways

The public realm standards set out the intended character, movement functions, and design outcomes for key streets and laneways across central Coburg (see map). These standards should be read in conjunction with the general standards (Part A) and the site standards (Part C) and guide the design of adjacent development and public interfaces.



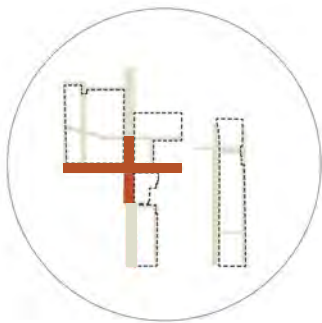
Newcastle East End by SBJ et al. Photo by Brett Boardman.



Streets and laneway map

Central heart

High quality central streets at the intersection of Victoria, Louisa and Waterfield Streets will improve safety and enjoyment in the heart of Coburg. Victoria Street Mall will also be revitalised and expanded as a key community destination.



Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Build on the existing character of Victoria Street Mall. > Apply alternate treatments to the carriageway, such as coloured asphalt, to signal a low speed, pedestrian and cyclist priority environment. > Use high-quality paving and surface treatments to reinforce the civic role of central Coburg and support event use at specific times of year.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The northern portion of Louisa Street, the southern portion of Waterfield Street and Victoria Street to act as slow streets mixing cyclists with vehicles. > Limit vehicle speeds by setting a 30 km/h speed limit. > Design the street to filter traffic and encourage reduced speeds using traffic-calming measures to reduce through traffic. > Enable pedestrians to easily cross to the piazza, Louisa Street pocket park and the multistorey carpark.

Central heart standards to be read in conjunction with Waterfield Street, Louisa Street, Victoria Street and Victoria Street Mall standards.



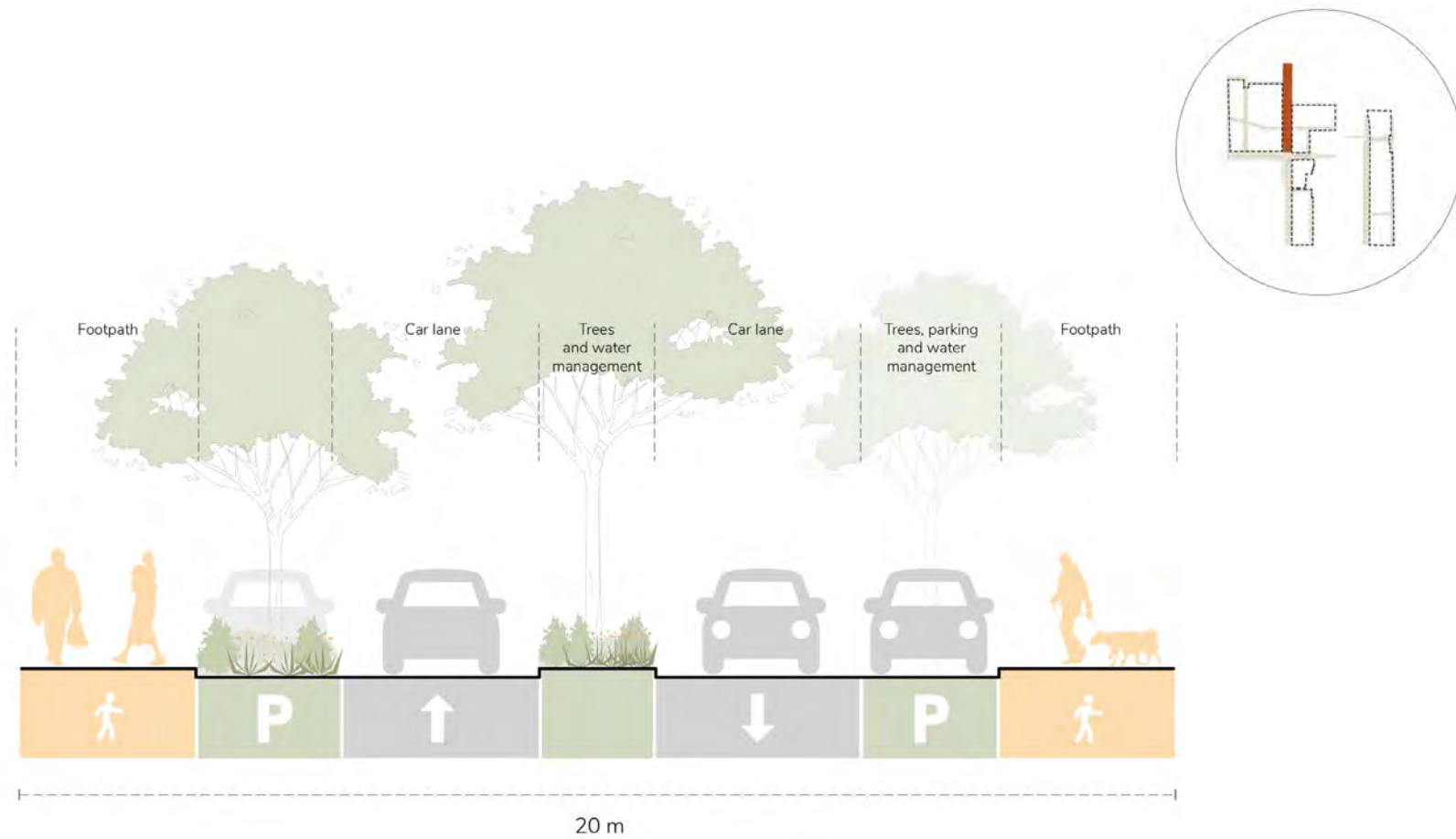
High quality, slow zone in Albert Street, Brunswick

Waterfield Street and Louisa Street

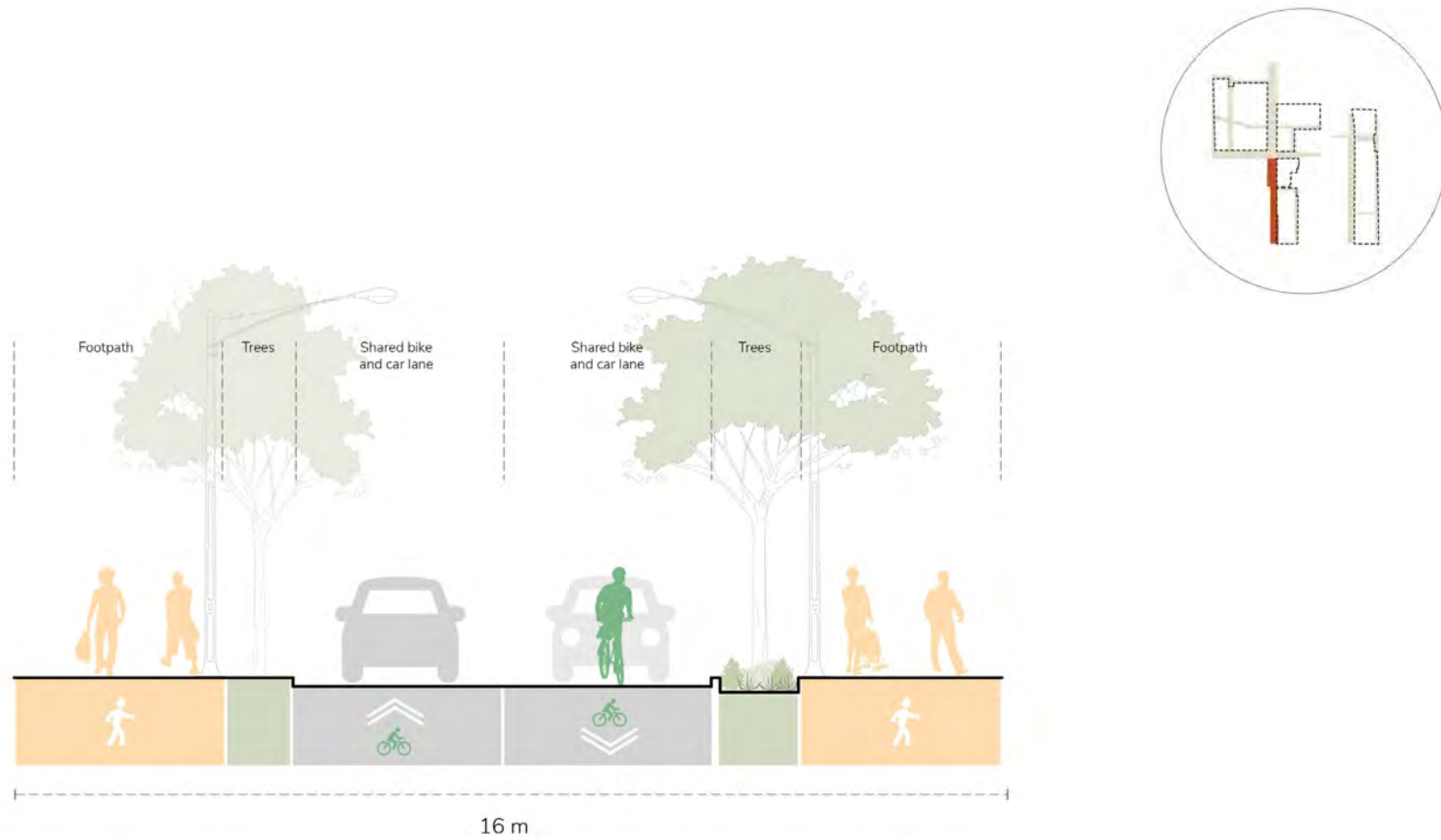
Deliver a vibrant primary street, prioritising pedestrians with generous footpaths and significant tree canopy connecting into the heart of the precinct. The vehicle speed should be limited to 30km/hr to support pedestrian and cycling safety. The street will have a water conveyance role with rain gardens to assist during major flood events.

Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide wide, generous pedestrian-focused streets, shaded by large canopy trees. > Encourage street activity and expand retail/hospital character of Waterfield Street. > Enable views to the Library and Piazza, Victoria Street Mall and churches, Bell Street and Munro Street.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create wide footpaths that prioritise pedestrians and cyclists. > Limit vehicle speeds by setting a 30 km/h speed limit and design the street to filter traffic and encourage reduced speeds using traffic-calming measures. > Integrate seating to encourage activation and support retail/hospitality along Waterfield Street. > Provide on-street parking and loading zones in the northern portion of Waterfield Street. > Avoid loading access adjacent to major pedestrian zones around the Piazza and Station Walk. > Use permeable paving for on-street parking and loading zones.

Theme	Standards
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Plant large canopy trees centrally in Waterfield Street, with medium trees along the footpath edges. > Plant trees in raingardens and tree pits, with understorey planting to maximise soft surfaces. > Canopy cover target = 25% > Deep soil requirements = 900m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Raingardens (minimum 50m²) on Waterfield Street > Raingardens (minimum 20m²) on Louisa Street > Integrate WSUD garden beds and tree pits
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Powerlines to be relocated underground in Waterfield Street > Water pipe to be upgraded on Waterfield and Louisa Street > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail



Waterfield Street



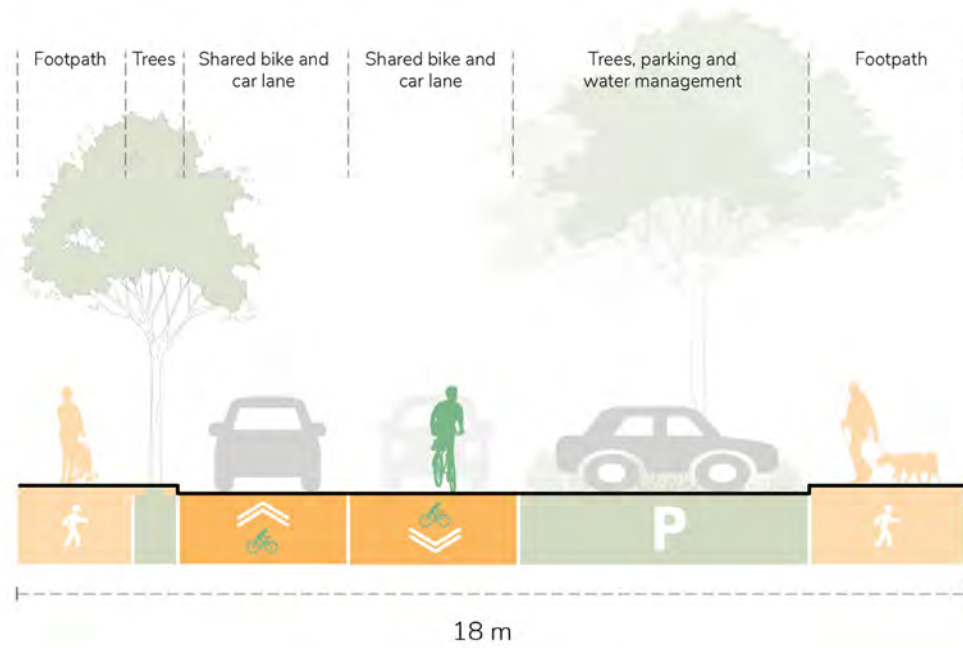
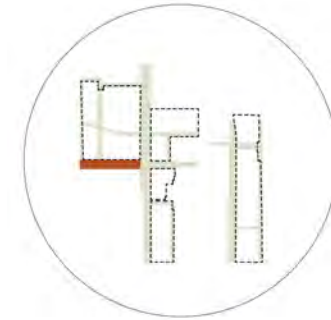
Louisa Street

Victoria Street and Victoria Street Mall

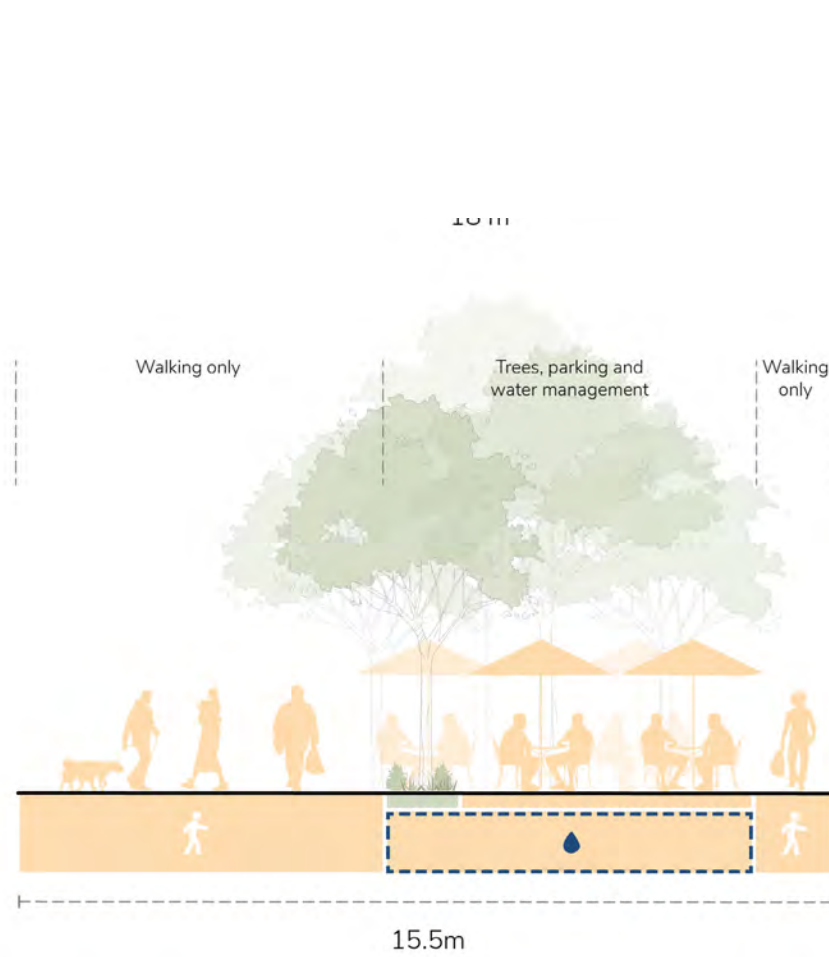
Deliver a primary pedestrian street along Victoria Mall, with an urban wetland and greening, while retaining existing mature trees. Victoria Street and Victoria Mall west will be a slow zone with high quality paving and a pedestrian friendly feel, extending the feel of Victoria Mall to the west. Greening should be prioritised, with the retention of the existing trees along the south side of Victoria Street and the installation of new raingardens.

Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Victoria Mall will be enhanced as an active, vibrant pedestrian street. > Victoria Street will be a slow zone with wide tree-lined footpaths and parking integrated with gardens and raingardens to the south. > Celebrate the views to the library and piazza, Waterfield/Louisa Street and the churches, the Upfield Corridor and Sydney Road.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Victoria Mall is to be retained as a pedestrianised street. > Limit vehicle speeds by setting a 30 km/h speed limit and designing the street environment to support it through traffic-calming measures. > Victoria Street to be a slow zone with high quality paving and a pedestrian feel, encouraging slow traffic to prioritise pedestrians and cycling safety. > Victoria Street to act as a slow street mixing cyclists with vehicle. > Integrate seating to encourage activation and support retail/hospitality. > Provide and optimise on-street parking on the southern side of Victoria Street with permeable pavement. > Provide drop-off zones on southern side of Victoria Street outside key community anchors (Greek Orthodox Parish and Uniting Church). > Avoid loading access adjacent to the Piazza. > Allow time-restricted loading in other areas where necessary, e.g., the western side of Victoria Mall.

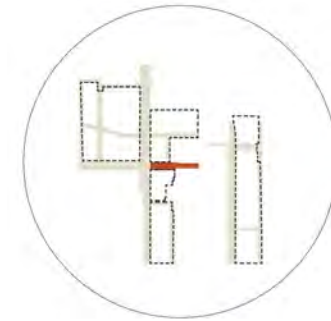
Theme	Standards
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Prioritise the retention of healthy existing trees where possible > Plant groups of large and medium trees to provide canopy cover > Plant trees in raingardens and tree pits, with understory planting to maximise soft surfaces > Canopy cover target = 40% > Deep soil requirement = 250m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Wetland (minimum 100m²) within the western side of Victoria Mall > Raingardens (minimum 20m²) on the southern side of Victoria Street > Integrate WSUD garden beds and tree pits
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Powerlines to be relocated underground in Victoria Street > Water pipe to be upgraded in Victoria Street > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail



Victoria Street



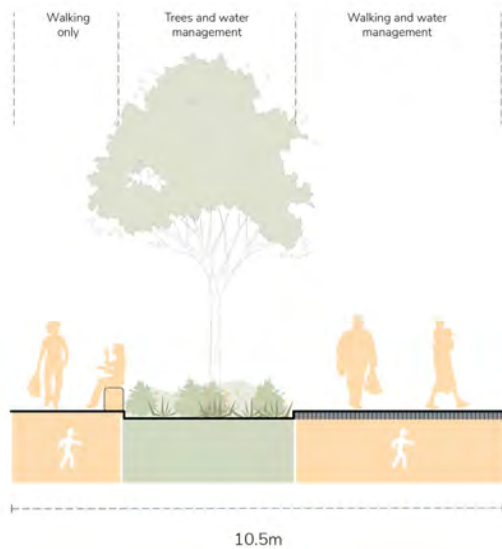
Victoria Street Mall



Mary Walk

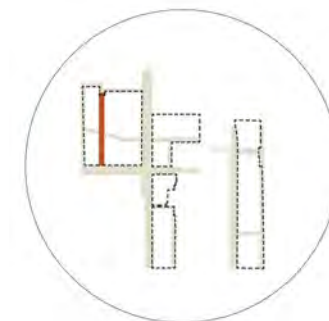
Deliver a pedestrian laneway linking Victoria Street, Station Walk and Mary Street north, with loading access only permitted in the north and south peripheries to protect the central pedestrian zone. The street will have a water conveyance role with raingardens and porous paving to assist mitigate flood during high rainfall events.

Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A new narrow, tree-lined, shaded, pedestrian street providing additional linkages to the precinct. > Provide views to Station Walk, the library, churches and Victoria Street.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Pedestrianised street with seating to encourage activation and support retail/hospitality. > Emergency vehicle clearance widths to be maintained along eastern side of the street. > Loading access to the north and south peripheries to protect the central pedestrian zone.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Medium scale trees to provide greening and trees planted in raingardens and garden beds, with understorey planting to maximise soft surfaces. > Canopy cover target = 30% > Deep soil requirement = 200m²



Mary Walk

Theme	Standards
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Northern part of Mary Street to have a water conveyance role. > Integrate WSUD garden beds and tree pits, with raingardens (minimum 10m²) and porous paving (minimum 300m²) in the northern section.
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Mary Walk to provide easement for new utilities connections. > Sewer main to be relocated. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.



Station Walk

Deliver a shared zone for pedestrians and slow speed cycling that connects Coburg Station to the library, piazza, Waterfield Street, and Sydney Road. Station Walk will be lined with active frontages and feel safe and inviting, with an avenue of canopy trees and seating.

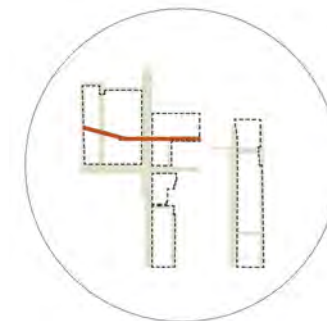
Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A new tree-lined pedestrian street connecting Coburg train station to Sydney Road. > Allow views to Coburg train station, library, piazza, churches, urban courtyard, Waterfield Street and Sydney Road. > Provide engaging building interfaces to encourage street activity. > Develop a distinctive materials palette to highlight the importance of the corridor.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a pedestrianised corridor with generous space for walking and low speed cycling. > Integrate seating to encourage activation and support retail/hospitality. > Station Walk to act as a shared cycling path, use materiality to encourage low cycling speeds to prioritise pedestrian safety.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Retention of existing trees where possible. > Medium size tree avenue planting extending along the entire length of Station Walk. > Trees planted in raingardens and tree pits, with understorey planting. > Canopy cover target = 30% > Deep soil requirement = 250m²

B - Public realm standards > Streets and laneways



Station Walk

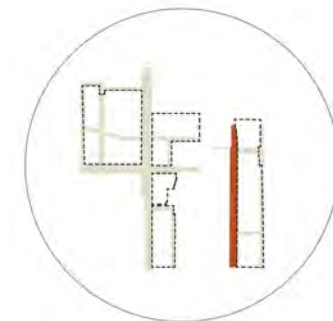
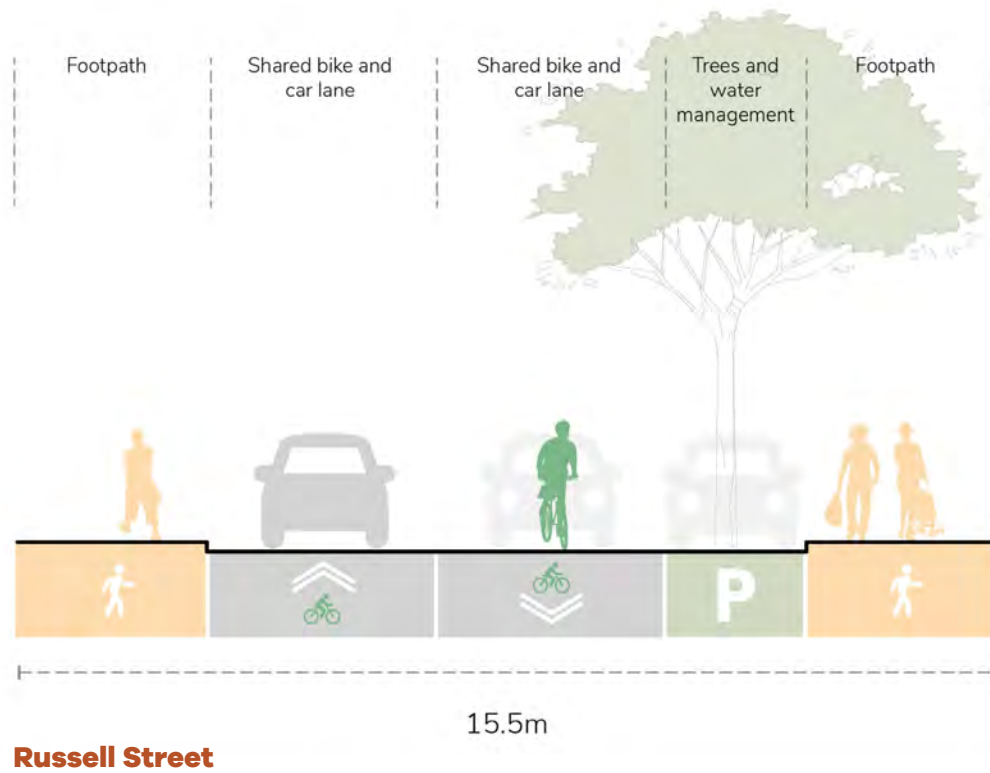
Theme	Standards
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WSUD/passive irrigation for tree pits and understorey planting. > Water conveyance role of moving water from Mary St north to the piazza during major flood events.
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Station Walk to provide easement for new utilities connections. > Sewer main to be relocated. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.



Russell Street

Deliver a upgraded street connecting Harding Street and Bell Street to Coburg Leisure Centre and City Oval, prioritising pedestrians and cyclists, while allowing back-of-house loading and access to the properties facing Sydney Road. The street will have a water conveyancing role, with integrated rain gardens, to assist during major flood events.

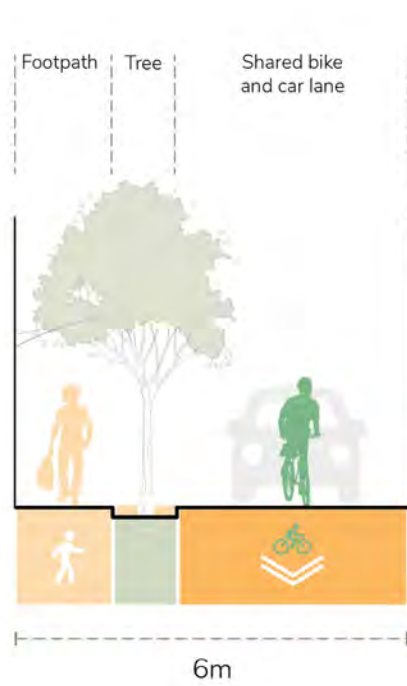
Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide views to Dunnes Lane, Page Street, Russell Street neighbourhood park, Russell Street linear park, Harding Street.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Enable pedestrian crossings aligned with Dunnes Lane and Page Street. > Limit vehicle speeds by setting a 30 km/h speed limit and designing the street environment to support it through traffic-calming measures. > Russell Street to act as a slow street mixing cyclists with vehicles. > On-street parking on the east side of Russell Street balanced with planting.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Retention of existing trees where possible. > Large and medium canopy tree planting on the east side of Russell Street. > Canopy trees planted on the west side of Russell Street where possible. > Trees planted in rain gardens and tree pits. > Canopy cover target = 25% > Deep soil requirement = 500m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a minimum of 20m² of raingardens at the southern end of Russell Street. > Provide permeable paving for on-street parking.
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Powerlines to be relocated underground. > Water pipe to be upgraded in the southern portion of Russell Street. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.



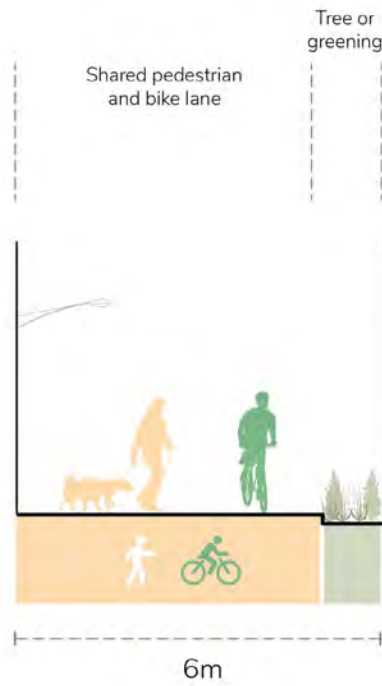
Public laneways

Public laneways are important human-scale throughfares that connect the larger sites and streets across the Precinct. New shared lanes, which support driving, walking and cycling, include Waterfield Lane, Foleys Lane, Market Lane, Page Lane and the Dunnes Lane extension. New walking and cycling lanes include Station Lane and City Oval Lane.

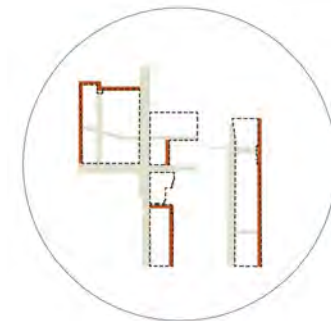
Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create friendly, neighbourhood-scale, green laneways. > Ensure clear sight lines and maintain important views. > Integrate opportunities for public art, e.g. murals.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Prioritise pedestrian and cycling safety in shared zones. > Designed walking and cycling lanes as cycling paths, use materiality to encourage low cycling speeds to prioritise pedestrian safety. > Ensure clearance for loading access requirements (e.g. small trucks) in shared lanes where required. > Integrate seating to encourage activation and support accessibility where possible. > Provide high-quality lighting to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Retain existing trees where possible. > Provide canopy trees and understorey planting where space allows and enable vertical greening in more constrained areas.
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Integrate WSUD garden beds and tree pits.
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Laneways to provide easement for new and relocated utilities connections.



Driving, walking and cycling lane



Walking and cycling lane

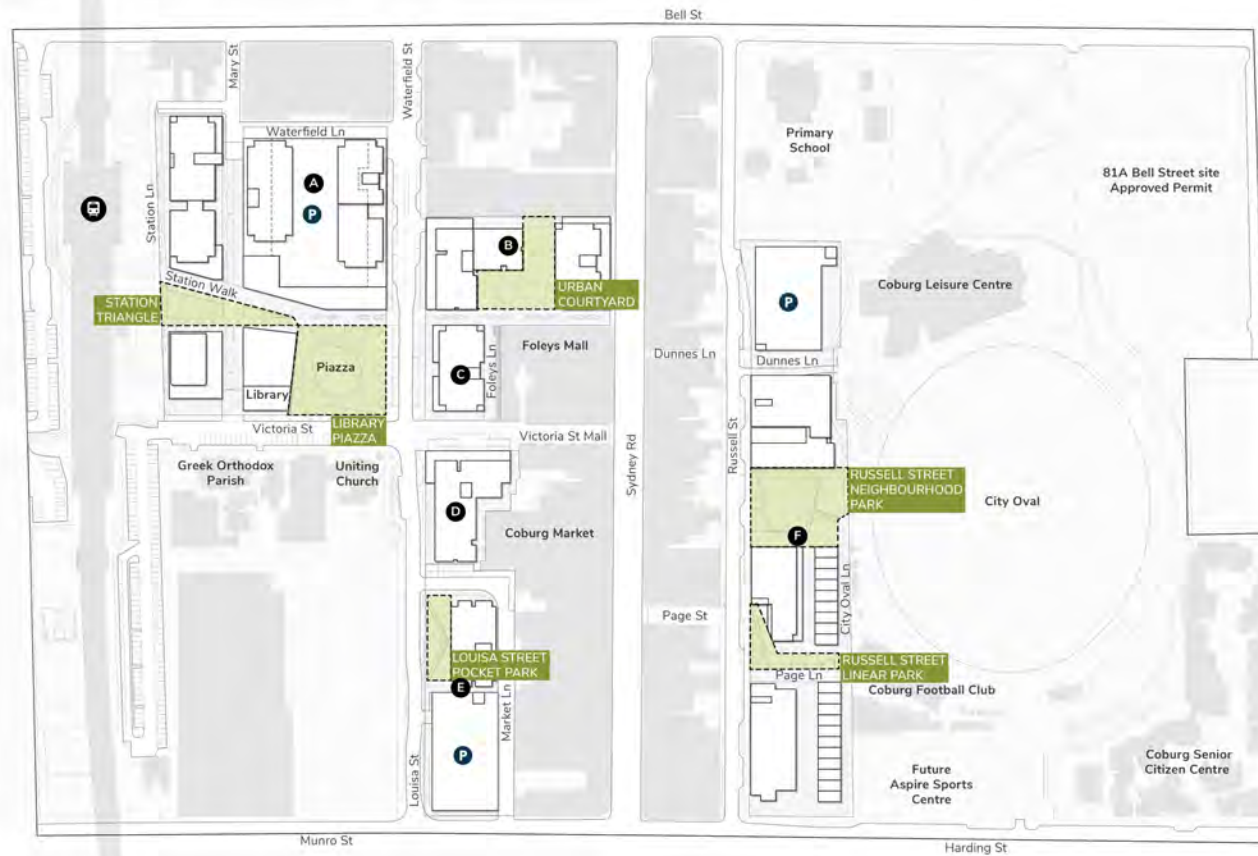


Public spaces

The public realm standards define the role, character, and key design outcomes for parks, plazas, and open spaces within central Coburg (see map). These standards should be read in conjunction with the general standards (Part A) and the site standards (Part C) and guide the design of adjacent development and public interfaces.



Monash University Maths by Emergent Studios. Photo by Tom Ross.



Public space map

B - Public realm standards > Public spaces

Station Triangle (Site A)

A vibrant green public space that acts as an arrival zone for the central Coburg precinct from Coburg train station. Large canopy trees provide shade and frame views to the old station building and along Station Walk towards the library and piazza. Raingardens, understorey planting and seating create a welcoming, inviting and flexible space.



B - Public realm standards > Public spaces

Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a welcoming, landscaped arrival zone between Coburg train station and the central Coburg Precinct. > Enable views to Coburg train station, Station Walk, Mary Street, the library and piazza.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Integrate seating to encourage activation and support retail/hospitality. > Allow clearance for emergency vehicles to cross Mary Street.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Include large and medium canopy tree planting to provide shade. > Provide flexible, multi-functional green space. > Canopy cover target = 35% > Deep soil requirement = 200m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a minimum flood storage of 134m³ > Include minimum 50m² of raingardens.
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Station Walk to provide easement for new utilities connections. > Sewer main to be relocated. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.

Piazza (Site A)

A new public space at the heart of central Coburg. With strong connections to the new library, it is an iconic space that represents Coburg’s past and future. It provides a flexible public space within a shaded, green environment. The piazza has a key role in flood retention to prevent flooding of the wider precinct.



Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide an iconic civic space celebrating the heart of central Coburg. > Allow views to Station Walk, library, Waterfield/Louisa Street, Victoria Street and Victoria Mall. > Prioritise opportunities for public art commissioning.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Integrate a variety of seating to encourage activation and support retail/hospitality. > Provide bike parking in accessible locations.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Prioritise retention of existing trees where possible. > Provide new large and medium canopy tree planting for shade. > Include flexible, multi-functional green space, e.g. lawn. > Canopy cover target = 55% > Deep soil requirement = 350m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a minimum flood storage volume of 680m³ > Include a minimum total of 200m² of wetlands.
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Victoria Street powerlines to be relocated underground. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.

Urban Courtyard (Site B)

A vibrant and welcoming green space, shaded with trees planted in deep soil zones. The space will be spatially adaptable, connected to the primary pedestrian spine of Station Walk, and be activated by retail and hospitality from surrounding buildings.



Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create a welcoming urban courtyard with canopy trees. > Allow views to Station Walk.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a flexible ground plane and seating to encourage activation by retail/hospitality around the edges.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide trees and understorey planting in deep soil zones. > Canopy cover target = 25% > Deep soil requirement = 200m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WSUD and passive irrigation for trees and understorey planting.
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sewer main to be removed. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.

Louisa Pocket Park (Site E)

A new medium-sized pocket park with trees, sunken garden and wetland spaces will provide flood retention and water sensitive urban design. The park will prioritise biodiversity with new tree planting, paths and seating to create a shaded, leafy green space with access to afternoon sun.



Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create a biodiverse pocket park. > Enable views to Louisa Street, the adjacent community hub, Victoria Street, Munro Street.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Integrate seating to encourage activation and support the adjacent community hub. > Include bike parking in an accessible location.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide new large and medium canopy trees for planting for shade. > High proportion of shrub planting with species selected for biodiversity and habitat. > Canopy cover target = 35% > Deep soil requirement = 125m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a minimum flood storage volume of 143m³ > Include a wetland or wetlands to a minimum total of 150m²
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Undergrounding of low voltage powerlines. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.

Russell Neighbourhood Park (Site F)

A new neighbourhood park that retains existing trees and provides a flexible, social green space with views to the oval, integrating new tree planting, wetland and shrub planting. The wetland area will make a significant contribution to reducing flooding in the precinct.



Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create a social neighbourhood park for the community. > Enable views to Russell Street, Dunnes Lane, Page Street and City Oval. > Explore the opportunity for public art commissioning.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide pathways connecting to key streets and destinations. > Integrate seating to encourage activation and provide respite from the adjacent sporting oval.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Retain the mature significant Eucalyptus camaldulensis (River Red Gum) in the north-east of the park. > Retain all other existing trees where possible. > Provide new large and medium-sized canopy tree planting. > Provide flexible, multi-functional green space. > Canopy cover target = 65% > Deep soil requirement = 250m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a minimum flood storage volume of 73m³ > Include a wetland or wetlands with a minimum size of 150m²
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sewer main, gas main and telecommunications to be relocated. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.

Russell Linear Park (Site F)

A new small pocket park that provides a relaxed, social green space integrating new tree planting and existing trees with open space and seating. Path connections should enhance the walkability of the precinct by enabling links to Page Street lane and neighbourhood park to the north.



Theme	Standards
Identity and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Create a green linear pocket park. > Enable views to Russell Street, Page Street and City Oval.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide pathways connecting the street to sporting facilities. > Seating to encourage activation and support respite from the adjacent oval.
Greening and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Retain the existing trees where possible. > Provide new large and medium canopy tree planting. > Canopy cover target = 90% > Deep soil requirement = 100m²
Water and climate resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a minimum flood storage volume of 43m³ > Include a raingarden or raingardens with a minimum total of 35m²
Infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sewer main, gas main and telecommunications to be relocated. > Refer to Central Coburg Utilities Capacity Study for further detail.



View along Victoria Street Mall looking towards Sydney Road. Indicative visualisation by Narrative.

C - Site standards

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C - SITE STANDARDS

- ❖ Site A
- ❖ Site B & C
- ❖ Site D
- ❖ Site E
- ❖ Site F



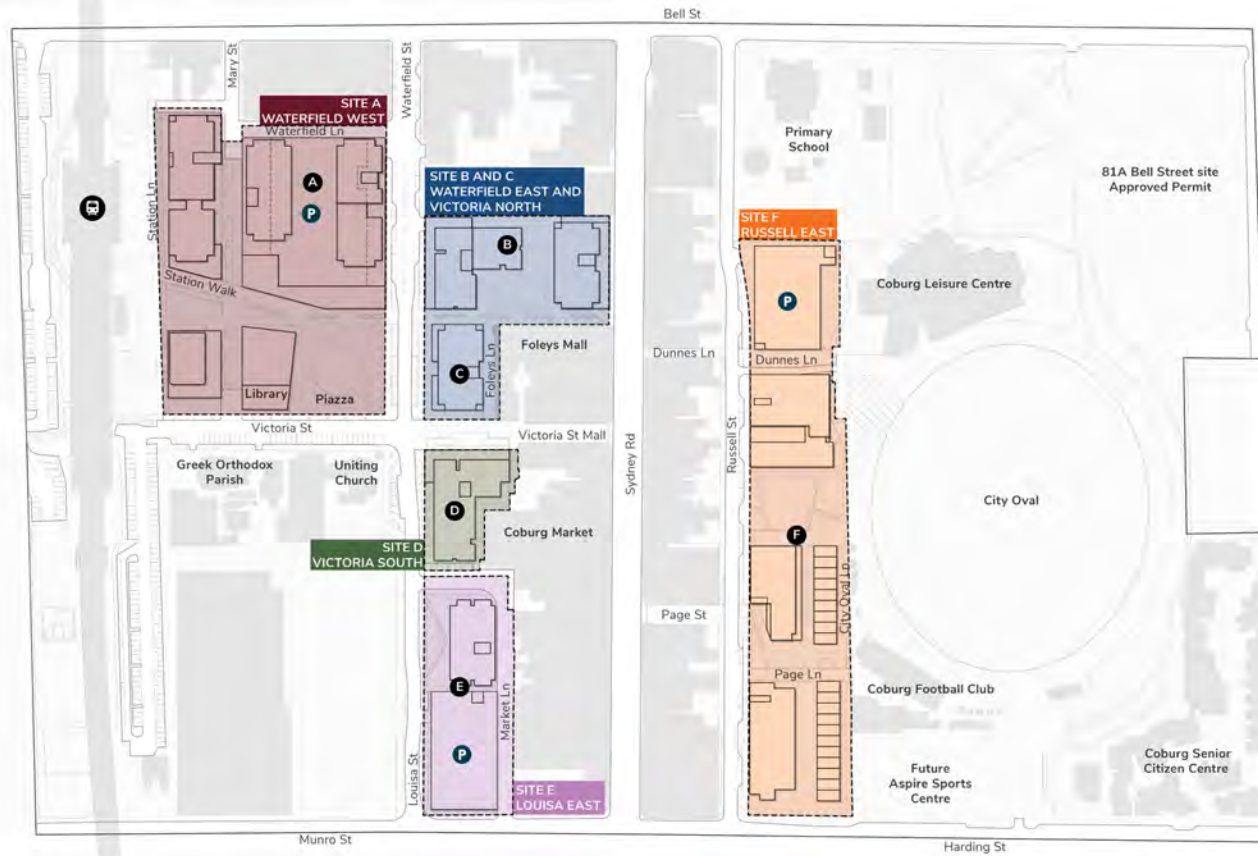
The Commons by Breathe Architecture and Nightingale. Photo by Diana Snape.

Sites

The following site standards set out specific design requirements for each development site within central Coburg, reflecting their unique context and role within the precinct (see map). These should be read in conjunction with the general standards (Part A) and public realm standards (Part B).



Richmond Traders, Photo by Diana Snape.



Sites map

C - Site standards > Sites

Site A

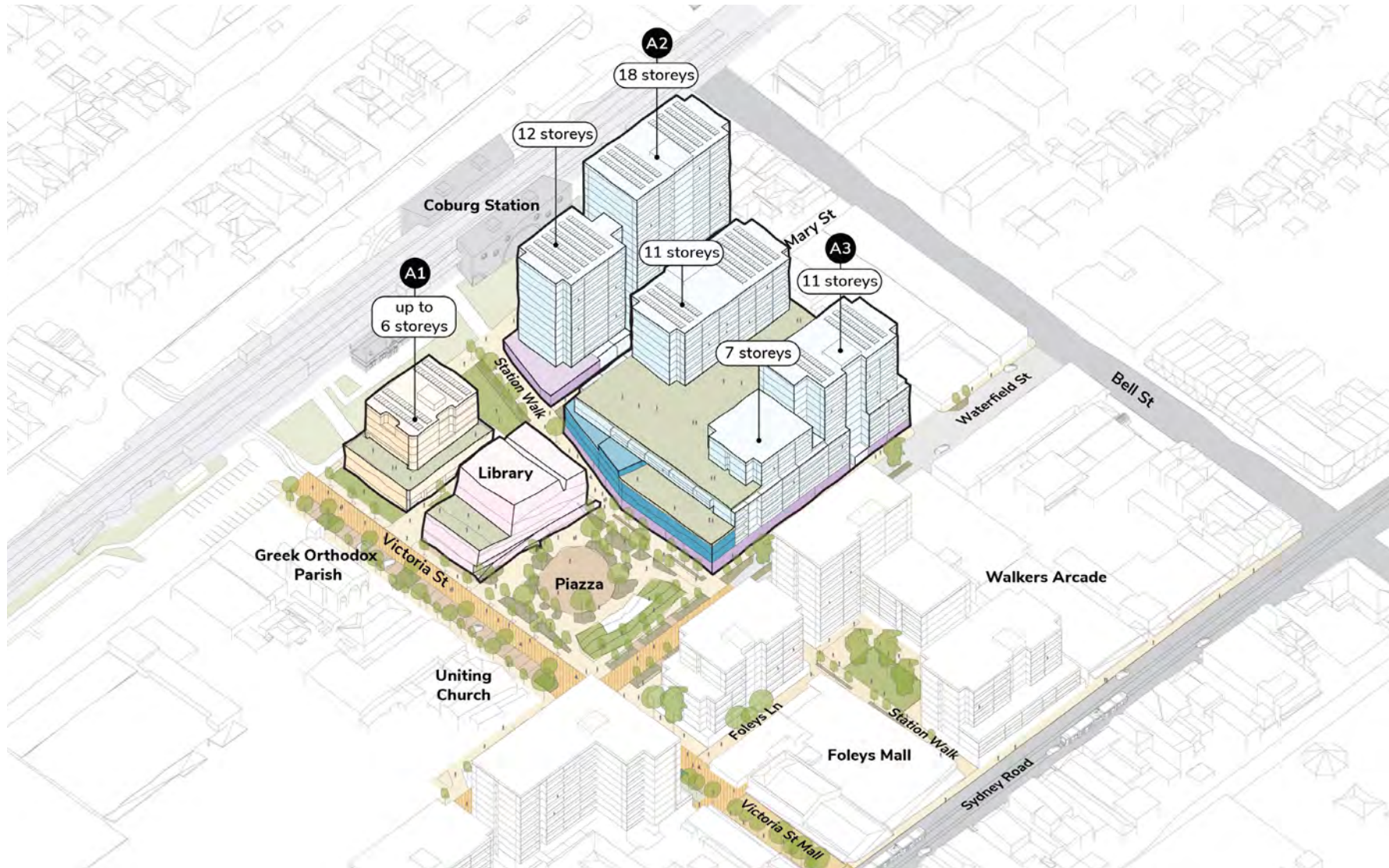
Waterfield West (Site A) will form the civic and commercial heart of central Coburg, anchored by a new library and piazza, with a mix of uses and active transport connections to Coburg Station and surrounding streets.

Key design aspirations

- > Establish the library and piazza as the primary civic and social heart of central Coburg.
- > Provide an activated public realm along key streets and laneways, maximising passive surveillance of key destinations including Coburg Station, the library, the piazza, and new and existing streets and laneways.
- > Create a safe, direct connection for walking and cycling between Coburg Station, the Upfield Bike Path, the library, the piazza, and east towards Sydney Road.
- > Integrate a large-format supermarket with fine-grain commercial tenancies to provide activation and contribute to the character of the precinct.
- > Deliver a permeable block structure with active laneways linking Waterfield, Mary, and Victoria Streets.
- > Deliver varied built form and architectural expression that reflects Coburg's character and protects the amenity of the piazza and key pedestrian corridors.
- > Contribute to the amenity and unique character of local landmarks along Victoria Street.
- > Provide safe and accessible off-street parking that is designed to prioritise accessibility and ease of use.
- > Protect solar access to Victoria Street Mall and to key local landmarks (Greek Orthodox Parish and Uniting Church).



Figure 1: Site A (indicative image only)



Theme	Minimum requirements
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a visual and physical connection between the former Coburg Station, the Library and Piazza, and Sydney Road. > Respond to Coburg Station as a key arrival point into the precinct. > Respond to the scale and character of churches on the southern side of Victoria Street. > Respond to the fine-grain retail character of Waterfield Street.
Built form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Buildings A1, A2 and A3 to align with preferred heights indicated in Figure 1, unless an alternative arrangement can demonstrate equal or improved public realm outcomes. > Building A1 to provide a minimum 8 metre ground level setback from Victoria Street and a maximum height of six storeys. > Building A2 to provide a preferred 1–3 storey podium. > Building A3 to provide a preferred 3–5 storey podium. > Locate taller built forms in less sensitive areas in the north and west, transitioning down to the south and east to protect amenity and sunlight access for the Piazza, Waterfield Street, Victoria Street, and surrounding landmark buildings. > Limit overshadowing of adjacent public spaces and key local landmarks (Greek Orthodox Parish and Uniting Church) in accordance with the overshadowing standards in Table 1 of the General Standards. > Provide additional mitigation measures at identified wind-sensitive locations, including building corners and spaces adjacent to Coburg Station. > Buildings to be designed to reflect and respond to the scale, form and architectural language of the library and piazza.
Interfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide continuous active frontage and weather protection to the piazza, Waterfield Street, and Station Walk, facilitating opportunities for outdoor dining. > Wrap the supermarket with smaller tenancies along all public interfaces, avoiding blank walls and large continuous frontages. > Locate primary building entrances and uses along the piazza and key pedestrian routes. > No large-scale or illuminated signage at the interface to the Piazza.

Theme	Minimum requirements
<p>Land use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Building A1 to be dedicated to community mixed use. > Building A2 to maximise ground-level active uses along the Upfield Corridor, Station Walk and Mary Walk (minimum 400m²), with smaller and more affordable tenancies to be prioritised along Mary Walk. > Building A3 to provide a minimum of 273 off-street car parks, designed to prioritise accessibility and ease of use, with intuitive wayfinding supported by digital signage, including illuminated guidance directing users efficiently to available car parks. > Building A3 to include a full-line supermarket (minimum 3,000m²), retail uses (minimum 1,300m²), and office or employment-generating uses (minimum 2,300m²), or an equivalent mix that achieves the same activity centre function. Activation of the public realm and outdoor dining spaces to be prioritised along Station Walk, Waterfield Street and Mary Walk.
<p>Movement and access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a new pedestrian and cycling route (Station Walk) connecting Coburg Station to Waterfield Street. > Deliver a pedestrian laneway (Mary Walk) connecting Mary Street to Victoria Street. > Locate vehicle access, servicing, and loading peripherally away from the piazza and key pedestrian areas.
<p>Public realm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a publicly accessible open space (Station Triangle), with a minimum area of 600m², designed as a key arrival space from Coburg Station and integrated with surrounding development. > Deliver Station Walk as a high-amenity public space, supporting active uses, outdoor dining, pedestrian movement and low-speed cycling. > Deliver Mary Walk as a laneway connecting Mary Street to Victoria Street.
<p>ESD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensure all development meets the Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) standards in Part A and other relevant Merri-bek sustainable building policies.

Site B & C

Waterfield East (Site B) and Victoria North (Site C) will be a place to live, shop and gather, centred around an urban courtyard and laneways that connect Sydney Road, Victoria Street Mall, and Waterfield Street.

Key design aspirations

- > Create a vibrant, fine-grain mixed-use precinct with clear connections to Sydney Road and Victoria Street Mall.
- > Deliver an approximately 1,000m² landscaped urban courtyard with deep soil planting and canopy trees, activated by retail and hospitality uses.
- > Establish a network of active laneways, including Station Walk, extending the new east-west connection between Coburg Station and Sydney Road.
- > Provide a shared link for walking and cycling between the urban courtyard and Victoria Street Mall.

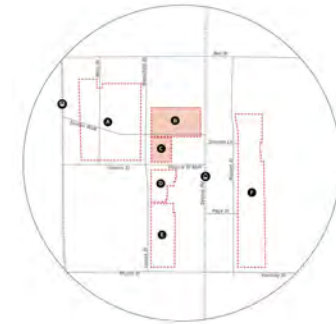
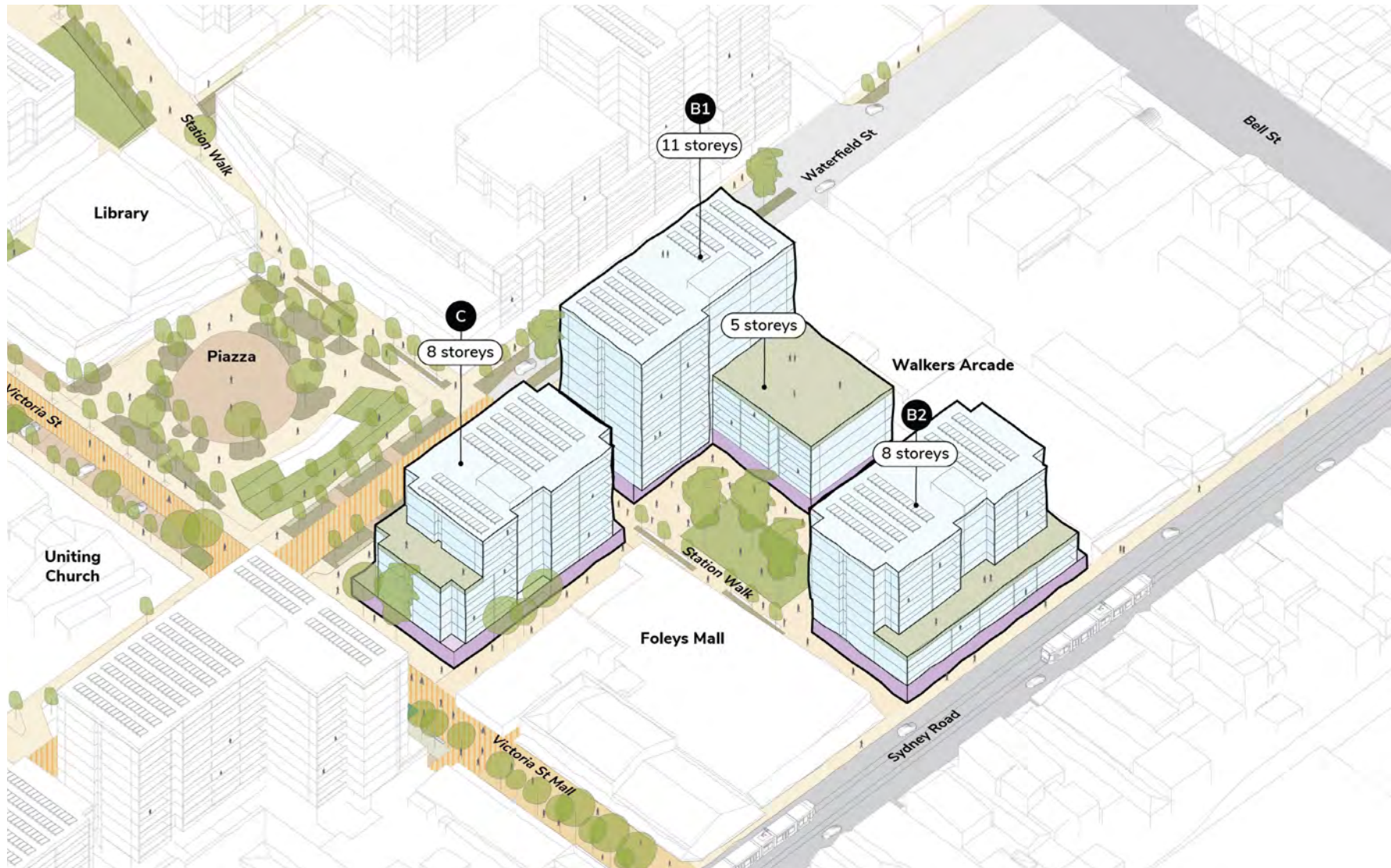


Figure 2: Site B & C (indicative image only)



C - Site standards > Site A

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Theme	Minimum requirements
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a differentiated response to the context on Sydney Road (east), Victoria Street Mall (south), and the new library and piazza (west). > Frame and address the urban courtyard as the key organising element of the site. > Complement the fine-grain retail character on Sydney Road and provide a north-south laneway that provides access to Foley’s Mall and existing retail and hospitality tenancies to the east.
Built form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Limit overshadowing of adjacent public spaces in accordance with the overshadowing standards in Table 1 of the General Standards. > Buildings B1,B2 & C to have built form aligned to the preferred heights indicated in Figure 2, unless an alternative arrangement can demonstrate equal or improved public realm outcomes. > Building B2 to provide a defined podium and street wall (up to a maximum of 3 storeys) along the Sydney Road interface. > Building C to provide a defined podium and street wall along the Sydney Road interface. > Step building heights down toward the south and east to protect sunlight access and amenity to the urban courtyard and Victoria Street Mall.
Interfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide continuous active frontages along Waterfield Street, Sydney Road interface, Victoria Street Mall and Station Walk, facilitating opportunities for outdoor dining. > Integrate awnings and weather protection along Waterfield Street, Station Walk and Sydney Road. > Ensure all buildings are designed to integrate with the urban courtyard, maximising active frontages and passive surveillances.

Theme	Minimum requirements
<p>Land use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver an active ground level with frequent entrances fronting the urban courtyard, Sydney Road, Station Walk and Waterfield Street. > Avoid large format tenancies, prioritising smaller and more affordable tenancies along laneways and tenancies interfacing the urban courtyard. > Deliver active retail uses across Sites B and C (minimum 3,000m²), or an equivalent mix that achieves a vibrant and active street and laneway network.
<p>Movement and access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a new east-west pedestrian link (Station Walk) connecting Waterfield Street and Sydney Road. > Deliver a new laneway between Victoria Street Mall and the urban courtyard, maintaining access to existing tenancies to the east, including Foley’s Mall. > Locate vehicle access from Waterfield Street, preferably from the northwest of the site.
<p>Public realm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a central open space (urban courtyard) of approximately 1,000m² as a landscaped, high-quality gathering space. > Deliver a network of laneways connecting Victoria Street Mall to the urban courtyard and Waterfield Street to Sydney Road. > Integrate planting, WSUD elements, and shading into the urban courtyard, laneways, and Waterfield Street to improve comfort and manage water.
<p>ESD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensure all development meets the Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) standards in Part A and other relevant Merri-bek sustainable building policies.

Site D

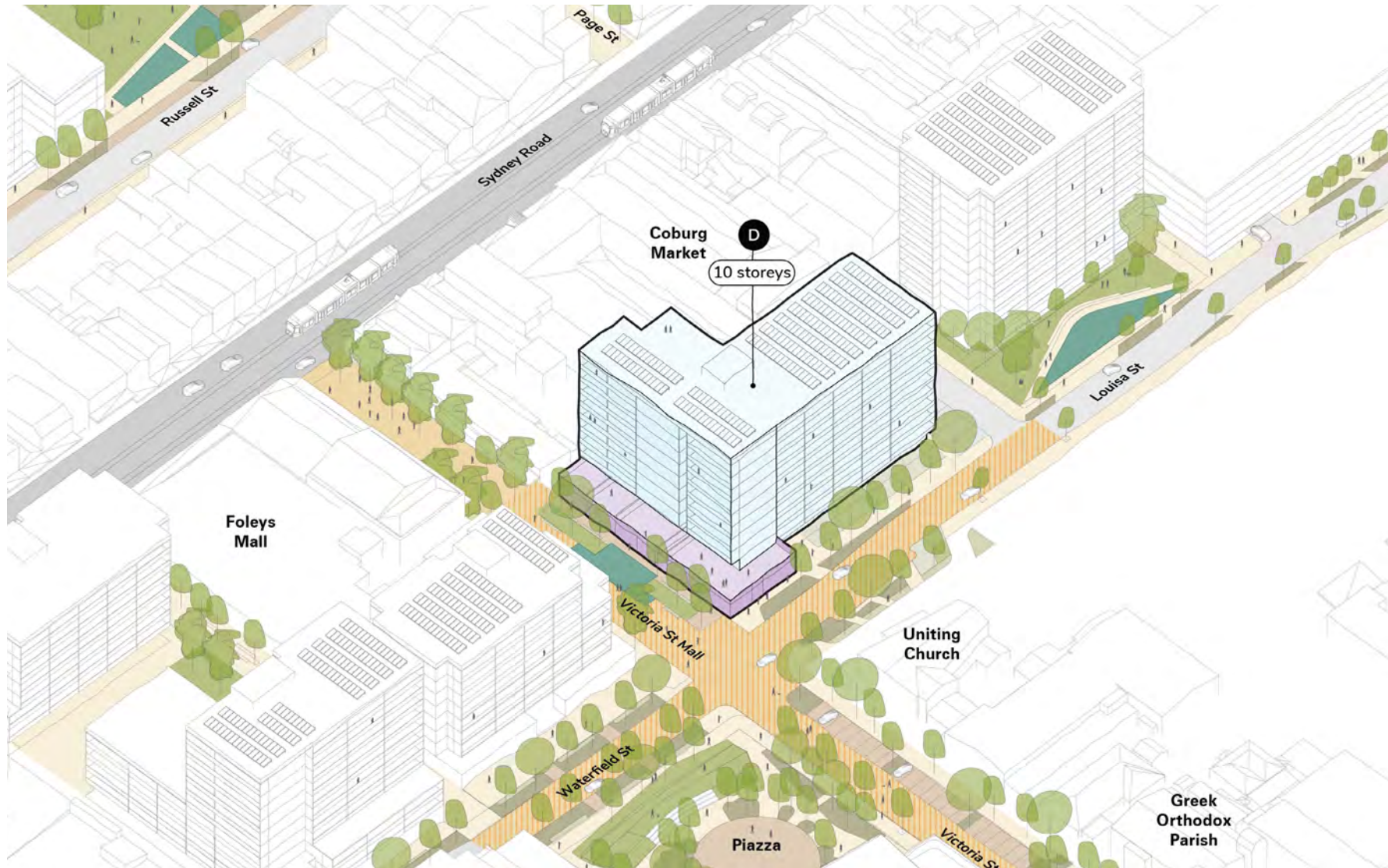
Victoria South (Site D) will be a mixed-use development that strengthens Victoria Street Mall as a key destination, while introducing new housing above and improving public realm quality along Louisa Street.

Key design aspirations

- > Deliver new housing in a central location and fine-grain retail to reinforce Victoria Street Mall as a vibrant retail and social hub.
- > Deliver a fine-grain, active street edge along Victoria Street that complements the character and rhythm of Victoria Street Mall.
- > Upgrade market servicing and access, including deeper loading zones and a new pedestrian pathway aligned with the Coburg Market entrance.



Figure 3: Site D (indicative image only)



C - Site standards > Site D

Theme	Minimum requirements
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reinforce Victoria Street Mall as a key social and community destination, supporting gathering, informal use, outdoor dining and everyday activity. > Respond to the Coburg Market as a key local anchor, improving its interface, access, and visibility from surrounding streets.
Built form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Limit overshadowing of adjacent public spaces in accordance with the overshadowing standards in Table 1 of the General Standards. > Align built form to the preferred heights, preferred podium heights and setbacks indicated in Figure 3, unless an alternative arrangement can demonstrate equal or improved public realm outcomes. > Provide upper levels set back to Victoria Street to reduce visual bulk and maintain a human-scaled street edge. > Provide a consistent low podium/street wall aligned with the scale along Victoria Street Mall.
Interfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide continuous active frontages along Victoria Street and Louisa Street. > Deliver fine-grain tenancies that provide depth, awnings and places to sit along Victoria Street Mall. > Respond to the market interface and integrate market servicing areas to the south to avoid dominance of the public realm. > Design podium upper level for communal uses to maximise access to afternoon sunlight, leveraging the year-round solar access provided by the adjacent Coburg Library and Piazza.

Theme	Minimum requirements
Land use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver active retail uses (minimum 540m²), or an equivalent mix that supports an active and vibrant street edge. > Provide a mix of tenancy sizes, prioritising smaller and more affordable tenancies. > Maintain and support the ongoing operation and functionality of Coburg Market.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Maintain necessary vehicle access for servicing and market operations, while minimising conflict with pedestrians. > Integrate safe and convenient bicycle access and parking.
Public realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Design ground floor interfaces to support outdoor dining along Victoria Street, including provision of adequate clear zones, services, and spatial allowances for Council-managed dining areas.
ESD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensure all development meets the Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) standards in Part A and other relevant Merri-bek sustainable building policies.

Site E

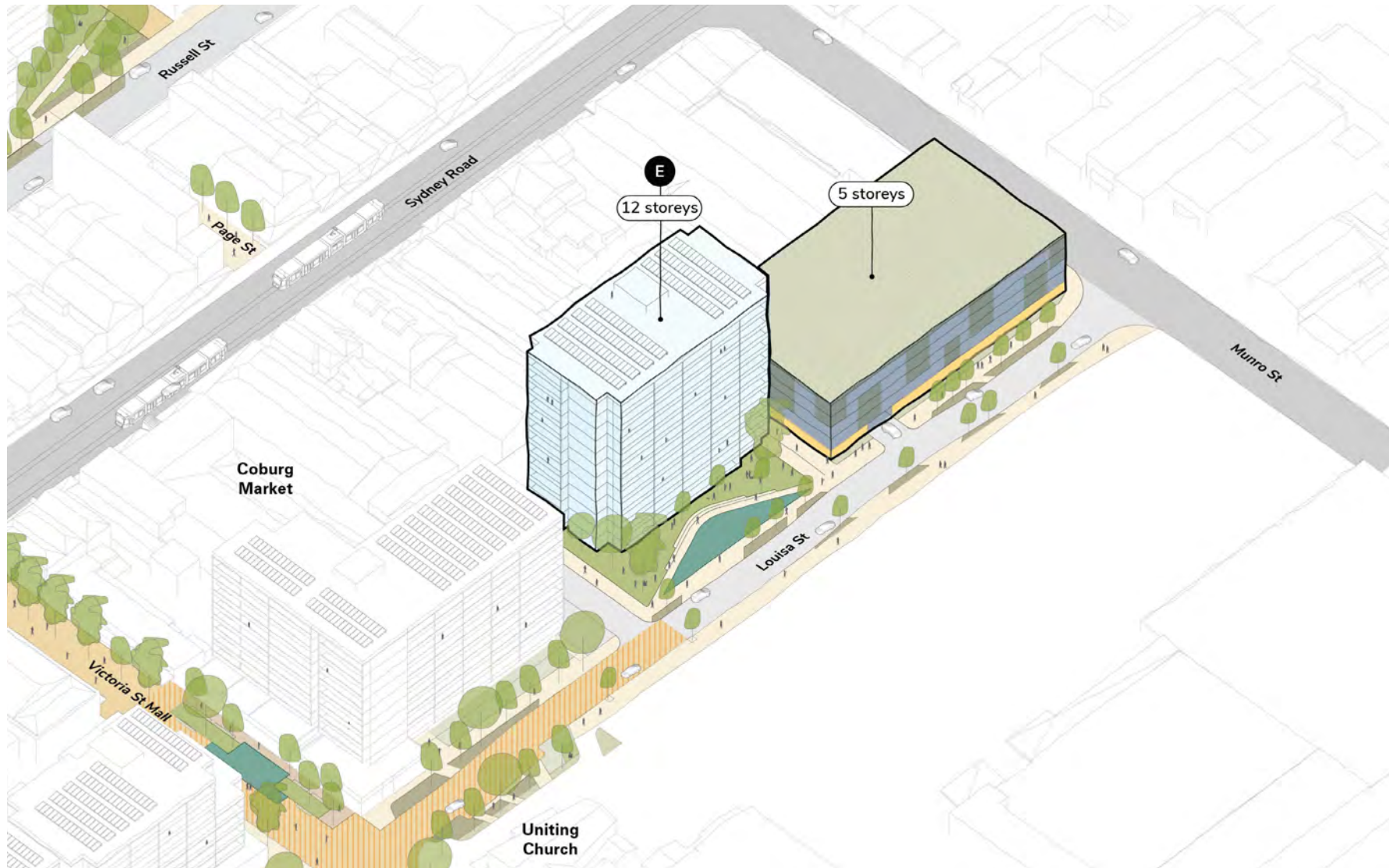
Louisa East will include housing to the north, set back from Louisa Street to create a new pocket park and urban wetland. To the south, it will be home to a multi-deck car park that is designed to be efficient, safe and adaptable.

Key design aspirations

- > Deliver high-quality housing setback from Louisa Street, overlooking a new high-amenity pocket park.
- > Create a new pocket park and urban wetland that supports community use and integrated water management.
- > Deliver a multi-deck car park that prioritises accessibility and ease of use while contributing positively to the street and public realm.
- > Design building interfaces to Munro Street, Louisa Street and the rear laneway to provide active frontages, passive surveillance, and a safe walking and cycling environment.
- > Maintain the opportunity to deliver up to 12-storeys of housing above the five storey multi-deck carpark.



Figure 4: Site E (indicative image only)



C - Site standards > Site E

Theme	Minimum requirements
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Maintain existing laneway networks and improve access to rear tenancies to east of the site. > Provide a laneway through the site to maintain connections to internal laneways within Sydney Road tenancies. > Respond to the Coburg Market as a key local anchor, improving its interface, access, and visibility from surrounding streets.
Built form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Buildings E to have built form aligned to the preferred heights and setbacks indicated in Figure 4, unless an alternative arrangement can demonstrate equal or improved public realm outcomes. > Limit overshadowing of adjacent public spaces in accordance with the overshadowing standards in Table 1 of the General Standards. > Deliver two distinct building typologies: a residential building to the north and a multi-deck car park to the south, each with a clearly defined architectural expression. > Deliver an adaptable multi-deck carpark, designed with sufficient floor-to-floor heights and structural layout to support active ground level uses and future adaptation of upper levels.
Interfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a high-quality residential interface to the public space, including building entries, communal areas, and windows, to support passive surveillance. > Ensure setbacks, landscaping and other measures are used to provide privacy for lower-level dwellings facing the car park, open space and laneways. > Incorporate green façades and/or public art to contribute to the character of Louisa Street. > Design the car park with high-quality façades, ground-level active interfaces that support passive surveillance, and a safe public realm.

Theme	Minimum requirements
Land use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide approximately 1,000m² affordable commercial space at the ground floor, made up of a mixture of tenancy sizes. > Provide a minimum of 212 off-street car parks in a multi-deck structure, designed to prioritise accessibility and ease of use, with intuitive wayfinding supported by digital signage, including illuminated guidance directing users efficiently to available car parks. > Design flexible multi-deck floorplates to support adaptation to other uses if carparking demand reduces in the future. > Consider opportunity to deliver housing above the multi-deck car park.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a new east–west laneway through the site, maintaining access to rear properties and supporting permeability. > Locate vehicle access to the car park to minimise conflict with pedestrians and cyclists. > Provide safe and legible pedestrian access through the site. > Integrate bicycle parking within the site and near the public space.
Public realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a new pocket park of approximately 550m² incorporating an urban wetland. > Integrate WSUD elements, including rain gardens and water-sensitive design, into the design of public space and Louisa Street. > Provide tree planting and canopy along Louisa Street.
ESD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensure all development meets the Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) standards in Part A and other relevant Merri-bek sustainable building policies.

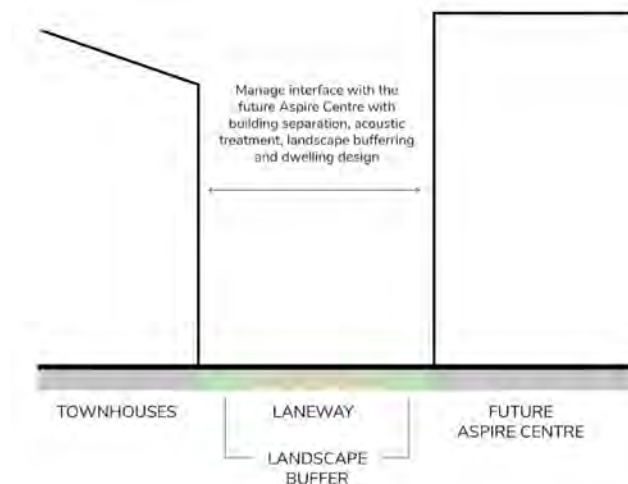
Site F

Russell East will provide diverse housing typologies that front and overlook City Oval and new public open spaces, creating a well-connected neighbourhood supported by integrated parking.

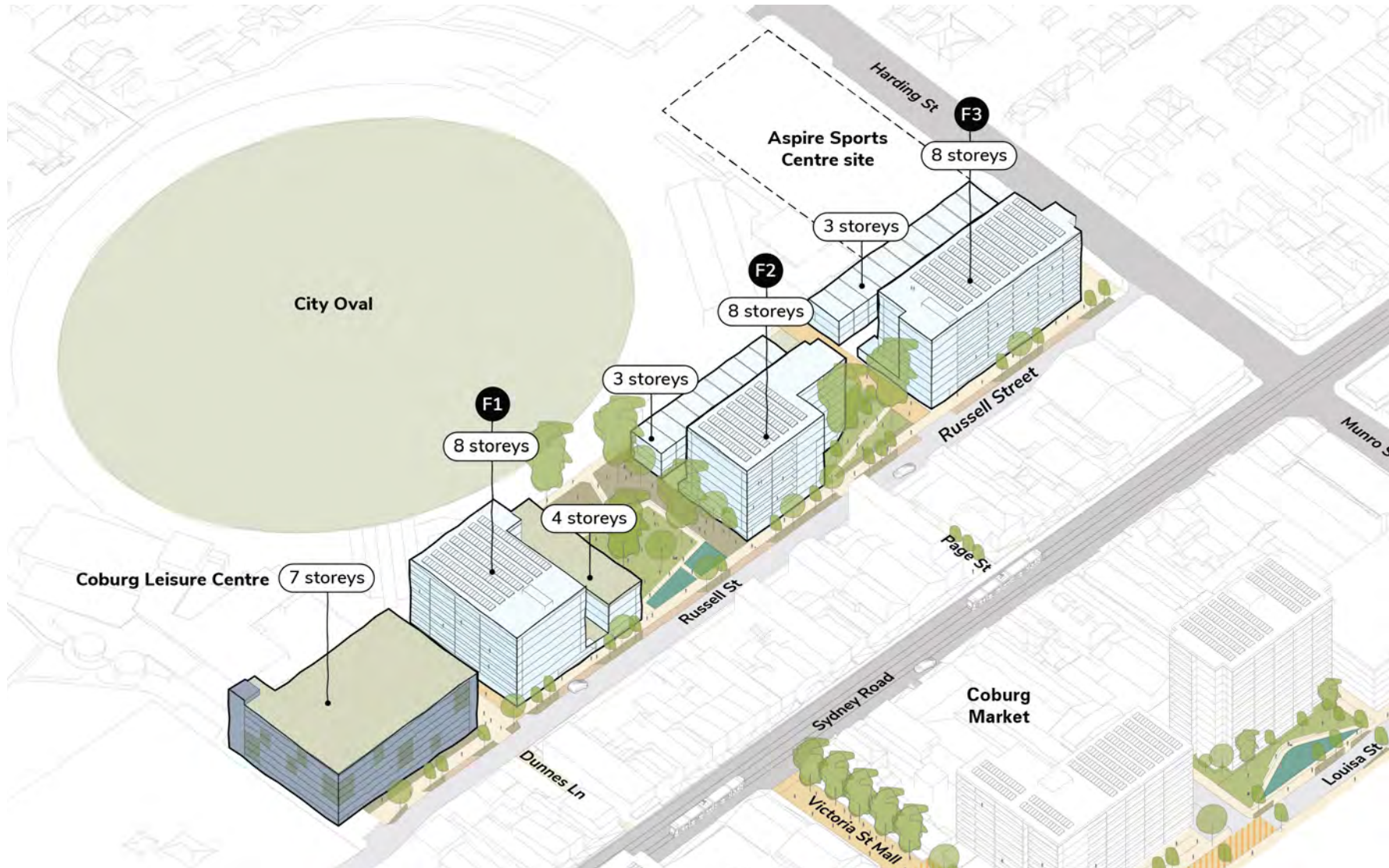


Key design aspirations

- > Provide a mix of housing types, including apartments and townhouses, to support diverse household needs.
- > Create a new neighbourhood park and a linear park that better connects Sydney Road to City Oval.
- > Deliver a multi-deck car park that prioritises accessibility and ease of use while contributing positively to the street and public realm.
- > Provide a legible network of streets, laneways, and shared paths that prioritise pedestrian movement and connect directly to City Oval, the Coburg Leisure Centre, and surrounding streets.



Managing interface with future Aspire Centre.



Theme	Minimum requirements
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Respond to City Oval, Coburg Leisure Centre, Coburg Primary School and the future Aspire Centre as key local anchors. > Provide a responsive design at the City Oval interfaces that maximises passive surveillance. > Reinforce visual and physical connections between Sydney Road, City Oval and the future Aspire Centre.
Built form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Buildings F1, F2 and F3 to have built form aligned to the preferred heights and setbacks indicated in Figure 5 unless an alternative arrangement can demonstrate equal or improved public realm outcomes. > Deliver a mix of building typologies, including a multi-deck car park, apartment buildings, and townhouses, responding to adjacent interfaces, with a lower scale towards City Oval. > Limit overshadowing of adjacent public spaces in accordance with the overshadowing standards in Table 1 of the General Standards. > Deliver a multi-storey car park with a preferred height of up to 7-storeys to the north of Dunnes Lane. > Provide an additional east-west link to the north of the multi-storey carpark if spatially viable. > Provide townhouses at the City Oval interface that maximise outlook to City Oval and Harding Street.
Interfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensure new buildings maximise passive surveillance to City Oval and new public spaces. > Integrate active uses at the ground floor of the car park where feasible. > Incorporate green façades and/or public art to contribute to the character of Russell Street. > Avoid blank walls and inactive edges, particularly along parks, shared paths, and laneways. > Manage the interface with the Aspire Centre through appropriate building separation, acoustic treatment, landscape buffering and dwelling design (including orientation of habitable rooms) to protect privacy and minimise noise impacts.

Theme	Minimum requirements
Land use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Provide a mix of dwelling types, including apartments and townhouses. > Provide a minimum of 392 off-street car parks in a multi-deck structure, designed to prioritise accessibility and ease of use, with intuitive wayfinding supported by digital signage, including illuminated guidance directing users efficiently to available car parks. > Where viable, provide a small-scale commercial or community space at the interface to the new neighbourhood park to support activation of the public realm.
Movement and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a new linear park connection linking Sydney Road to City Oval and the future Aspire Centre via Page Street. > Increase the width of the linear park if feasible to support increased tree planting. > Ensure the laneway to the south of the linear park is sufficiently wide to accommodate shared pedestrian, cyclist and vehicle movements. > Maintain Russell Street as a key access route to surrounding areas.
Public realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Deliver a new neighbourhood park of approximately 1,850m², co-located with existing mature trees to maximise tree retention. > Integrate an urban wetland within the neighbourhood park to support water management and habitat. > Deliver a linear park connection between Sydney Road and City Oval (minimum 650m²), with its location and design informed by the retention of existing mature trees.
ESD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensure all development meets the Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) standards in Part A and other relevant Merri-bek sustainable building policies.



Memorandum



To:	Merri-bek City Council	From:	David Trotter (Traffix Group)
Our Ref:	G36153M-03D	Date:	Tuesday 2 nd June, 2026
Coburg Activity Centre – Central Coburg Precinct Framework Traffic Modelling			

1. Summary

Having undertaken traffic modelling works to assess the traffic performance impacts associated with the Framework, and identify opportunities to improve road safety, connectivity and amenity, whilst supporting traffic performance, a summary of the key findings is provided within this Memorandum.

In reviewing both the performance of the existing road network, as well as potential future conditions, it is important to consider the following:

- Both traffic evaporation and traffic inducement can occur as a result of increases/decreases to intersection/road capacity. For example, when additional traffic capacity is provided within a network there is commonly an inducement whereby overall traffic volumes increase, outside of any changes to traffic attractors to an area.
- To some extent, there is a natural equilibrium reached within the surrounding transport network. That is, people adjust their travel mode, behaviour, destination and route to match current conditions. For example, a shopper may shop at a different time and/or take a different travel route/mode if they aware of any traffic/parking constraints within an area at a certain time.
- There are strategic decisions and priorities which need to be made with respect to different user groups. That is, improvements to one transport user group may sometimes come at the expense of other user groups, for example, the provision on-road bicycle lanes (favour cyclists) at the potential detriment of motorists (loss of parking/traffic capacity).

The above does not seek to diminish the accuracy of this traffic analysis, rather to acknowledge that, to some extent, traffic performance will adjust to match the network capacity, and that in some instances network changes may need to consider the prioritisation between different transport modes.

The key intersections, for which potential upgrades are identified, as part of this modelling/analysis, are shown in Figure 1.

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Figure 1: Key Intersections (Source: Nearmap)

Key findings for each of the intersections shown within Figure 1 are summarised below and in further detail within Table 1.

Munro Street / Harding Street / Sydney Road intersection

Traffic modelling indicates that replacing the existing short left-turn lanes with dedicated on-street bicycle lanes would result in a slight but manageable reduction in intersection performance, with no notable impact for motorists. The proposed bicycle lanes would significantly improve cyclist safety and create a continuous connection across the intersection. Delivering bicycle lanes would deliver on Council's priority to support active transport along this corridor, providing a net community benefit despite the minor increase in vehicle capacity.

Bell Street / Russell Street intersection

Traffic modelling assessed three options involving restricted turning movements and found that limiting the intersection to left-in / left-out access (with or without extending the U-turn facility) would improve pedestrian safety but exceeds the theoretical capacity of the U-turn facility, resulting in insufficient accommodation of traffic demand. While these options would simplify movements and enhance safety for pedestrians along Bell Street, particularly near key crossing points, they would require vehicles to re-route via Harding Street and rely heavily on the nearby U-turn facility, which may require signalisation and



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further modelling to confirm feasibility. An alternative option is recommended for further testing, to retain right-turn access from Bell Street onto Russell Street (southbound traffic), while removing right-turn access from Russell Street onto Bell Street (northbound traffic).

Louisa Street / Munro Street intersection

Traffic modelling assessed replacing the existing roundabout with signalisation and found that, while it would improve safety outcomes for pedestrians and cyclists, it would reduce intersection traffic performance. An alternative option is recommended for further investigation, involving retention of the roundabout with targeted line-marking and signage improvements to enhance safety while maintaining acceptable traffic performance.

Bell Street / Waterfield Street intersection

Traffic modelling assessed three signalisation and layout options. The modelling indicated that that whilst full or partial signalisation would improve safety and pedestrian amenity, it would result in decreased traffic performance with significant queues on Bell Street, particularly west of the intersection. An alternate option is recommended for further testing which maintains the existing layout whilst introducing safety improvements, such as changes to line-marking and signage.

Waterfield Street / Victoria Street intersection

Traffic modelling assessed two options and found that introducing a traffic filter on Waterfield Street would maintain overall traffic performance while significantly improving pedestrian amenity and safety by removing vehicle interactions at a key east-west crossing point. An alternative option is to retain existing through movement with added traffic calming measures along the street, which would maintain traffic performance and reduce vehicle speeds, delivering some safety benefits. However, this approach would not provide the same level of pedestrian protection as a filtered, car-free crossing.

Table 1: Summary of Key Findings

Option	Location	Description	Traffic Performance	Road Safety	Connectivity and Amenity	Key Findings
1	Munro Street / Harding Street / Sydney Road intersection	Provision of dedicated on-street bicycle lanes in lieu of short left-turn lanes	Slight decrease (but manageable) in intersection performance compared to retention of the existing intersection layout.	Dedicated on-street bicycle lanes will improve the safety of cyclists travelling along the Munro Street / Harding Street corridor.	No change for motorists. Cyclists would benefit from the proposed on-street bicycle lanes at the intersection, providing a connection between the existing lanes on both sides of the intersection.	A trade-off between cyclists and drivers will have to be considered by Council when considering if dedicated bicycle lanes should(n't) be provided in lieu of the existing left-turn lanes. In removing the left-turn lanes for a bicycle lane, Council is making a strategic decision to prioritise sustainable transport over vehicle movement. This expands access to the Centre for sustainable transport modes, providing an overall net benefit and support to Council's priority to support the provision of sustainable transport over private motor vehicle movement.
2	Bell Street / Russell Street Intersection	Limiting the intersection to only allow left-in / left-out vehicle movements	The anticipated traffic volumes exceed the theoretical capacity of the U-turn movement (even with the extended U-turn facility) which would be required following a ban on right-turn movements into and out of Russell Street.	Pedestrian safety will be improved, particularly for pedestrians travelling along Bell Street, including those travelling between the bus stop and Sydney Road footpath.	Traffic seeking to exit Russell Street and travel in a general eastern direction will need to utilise Harding Street.	Limiting the intersection to only allow left-in / left-out access and solely relying on the existing U-turn facility will not be sufficient to accommodate the anticipated vehicle movements.
		Limiting the intersection to only allow left-in / left-out vehicle movements and extending the existing U-turn facility			Motorists wanting to turn right onto Russell Street from Bell Street will have to utilise the U-turn lane, located approximately 70m further east, to access Russell Street.	Potentially signalising the U-turn facility will improve traffic performance, but further traffic modelling is required to confirm the impact of the same.
		Maintain right-turn access from Bell Street onto Russell Street but remove the right-turn access out from Russell Street onto Bell Street.	Further traffic modelling is required to confirm the impact.	Doesn't require motorists to complete a right-turn onto Bell Street either in one movement or staged (i.e. using the central median break). Given traffic volumes, vehicle queuing which can inhibit motorist sight lines, and the staged nature of the turn movement, there are potentially existing safety issues with this existing movement which would no longer occur following removal of the movement.	Traffic seeking to exit Russell Street and travel in a general eastern direction will need to utilise Harding Street.	Further traffic modelling is required to confirm the impact of this option.



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Option	Location	Description	Traffic Performance	Road Safety	Connectivity and Amenity	Key Findings
3	Louisa Street / Munro Street Intersection	Signalisation of the intersection to replace the existing roundabout facility	Decrease in traffic performance post-signalisation.	Signalisation should, as a general rule, improve safety for all users, particularly pedestrians. Improved safety for cyclists, particularly those travelling eastbound, who currently need to merge with general traffic immediately prior to the roundabout.	No change for motorists, but pedestrians would benefit from the signalisation of Louisa Street / Munro Street, particularly through the inclusion of a formal north-south crossing.	Whilst the traffic performance worsens with the proposed signalisation of Louisa Street / Munro Street intersection, there are benefits for other road users, including cyclists and pedestrians.
		Maintain existing roundabout, and potentially introduce line-marking/signage changes	Unchanged.	Whilst subject to the specific changes implemented, likely improvements for all user groups.	Unchanged, unless a north-south orientated pedestrian crossing is provided as part of these works.	Further investigations required to confirm the specific changes and their potential safety benefit.
4	Bell Street / Waterfield Street Intersection	Full signalisation of the intersection (all movements permitted)	Decrease in traffic performance post-signalisation, with significant queues for eastbound traffic on Bell Street.	Signalisation should, as a general rule, improve safety for all users, particularly pedestrians.	Improved amenity/options for motorists exiting the Centre and travelling in an eastern direction. Provision of an additional pedestrian crossing of Bell Street for pedestrians.	Significant traffic queues form along Bell Street, west of Waterfield Street. A balance, and identification of priorities, would need to be established between traffic performance relative to road safety and amenity.
		Partial signalisation of the intersection (right-turn exit onto Bell Street prohibited)	Generally, as above, with slight improvement.		No fundamental change.	
		Maintain existing intersection layout, and potentially introduce line-marking / additional signage	Unchanged.	Any additional signage, line-marking, would provide improved road safety.	Unchanged.	Further investigations required to confirm the specific changes and their potential safety benefit.
5	Waterfield Street / Victoria Street Intersection	Introduction of traffic filter for motorists (while allowing for cyclists and pedestrians); slightly north of Victoria Street	Generally unchanged.	Physically removes the interaction between pedestrians and motor vehicles, in an east-west direction, immediately north of Victoria Street.	Motorists, using the car parks off Waterfield Street / Louisa Street, will need to make a more conscious decision in how they approach the site, depending on where they want (or need) to park. Improved amenity for pedestrians as it allows for a car free crossing of Waterfield Street, immediately north of Victoria Street.	Traffic and intersection performance generally unchanged. Substantial improvements to pedestrian amenity.
		Maintain existing through function for Waterfield Street and introduce traffic calming measures along Waterfield Street	Unchanged.	Installation of traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, will reduce traffic speeds along Waterfield Street. Whilst lower vehicle speeds are beneficial for all road users, from a purely road safety perspective, it is noted that it would not afford the same benefits as a traffic filter. Specifically, the provision of an east-west pedestrian crossing of Waterfield Street, is inherently less safe than a scenario where pedestrians (who are crossing) are physically restricted from motorists (due to a traffic filter).	Unchanged.	No changes to traffic performance. Improved road safety, relative to existing conditions, for all road users.



G36153M-03D

7.3 PLACES FOR PEOPLE PLAN 2026

Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade

City Design and Economy

Officer recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the findings of the community engagement on the draft *Places for People Plan*.
2. Adopts *Places for People* (Attachment 1) for implementation.
3. Revokes the Shopping Strip Renewal Policy 2015–2025 and notes that it is superseded by and incorporated into *Places for People*.
4. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to make minor changes to the policy document for publication, as required.

REPORT

Executive summary

Places for People (the Plan) is Council's long-term strategy to deliver high-quality public spaces that support the vibrancy, sustainability and liveability of Merri-bek's shopping strips and activity centres.

The Plan sets out Council's approach to improving public spaces and prioritising projects. It will guide future investment in the public realm by identifying opportunities for improvement, addressing key challenges, and maximising the benefits of public space. It also establishes principles to guide and measure the impact of future public realm projects in activity centres and shopping strips.

Places for People sits alongside and complements Council's two other significant public realm plans: *Streets for People* which focuses on Merri-bek's streets and transport infrastructure; and the *Open Space Strategy* which sets out how we plan, deliver and maintain open spaces in Merri-bek.

Council endorsed a draft *Places for People* plan community engagement in December 2025. Community engagement was undertaken for five weeks from Thursday 12 February to Wednesday 18 March 2026. The engagement sought feedback to understand the community's perspective on challenges and opportunities in their local public spaces. There was general community support for the plan with key feedback points including:

- Equity in public space provision
- Greening, shade and climate comfort
- Safety, accessibility and movement
- Balancing different needs in our activity centres
- Connecting to Country

Places for People frames existing budget allocations for activity centre upgrades in Council's long term capital works program. This plan will provide strategic direction and a framework for prioritising projects in activity centres and shopping strips.

Previous Council decisions

Endorsement of the draft *Places for People Plan* for community engagement – 10 December 2025

That Council:

1. *Endorses the draft Places for People Plan for community engagement for five weeks from February to March 2026.*
2. *Receives a further report at the May 2026 Council meeting with a final version of the Places for People Plan, updated following community feedback, and a community engagement report that outlines the feedback received and how this feedback influenced the final version of the Places for People Plan.*

Streets for People Plan – 13 August 2025

That Council:

...

3. *Adopts the Streets for People Plan (Attachment 1), including the Streets for People network, the high priority projects list, and the Streets for People process for design, community engagement, and delivery.*

...

Adoption of New Merri-bek Open Space Strategy – 10 April 2024

That Council:

1. *Endorses as final the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy (Attachment 1) and associated Action Plan (Attachment 2)...*

...

1. Policy context

Places for People aligns with the strategic direction of Merri-bek Council and our existing policy framework which are identified in the plan under Section 3: Policy Context, including:

Council Plan 2025-2029

Places for People directly aligns with all five focus areas outlined in the Council Plan, including:

- **Care for nature and climate resilience** by increasing tree canopy cover and street greening and implementing water sensitive urban design elements to our centres.
- **Healthy and inclusive communities** by ensuring public spaces are accessible, comfortable, build connection and belonging, and encourage participation of people from diverse backgrounds.
- **Beautiful and liveable city** by creating well-maintained, functional public spaces that add greenery, well-designed street furniture, and public art to our shopping areas.
- **Thriving economy and culture** by creating public spaces that support economic activity by attracting visitors and providing spaces that encourage people to stay longer around local businesses.
- **Engaging and responsible Council** by involving our community in the development of the plan and evaluating our new and improved public spaces to ensure they continue to deliver on community needs.

Public realm strategies – *Streets for People* and *Open Space Strategy*

The public realm includes publicly owned outdoor places that are open to everyone to move through, rest, recreate and come together. In Merri-bek, the public realm generally includes streets, parks and other public spaces. *Places for People* sits alongside and complements Council's two other significant public realm plans: the *Streets for People* plan which focuses on Merri-bek's streets and transport infrastructure; and the *Open Space Strategy* which sets out how we plan, deliver and maintain parks and open spaces in Merri-bek.



Image 1: Merri-bek's three strategic direction elements for the public realm

Places for People was developed in response to Action 2.11 of the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy Action Plan:

'Prepare a Civic Spaces Action Plan for Brunswick, Coburg and Glenroy Activity centres which:

- *Develops key principles and criteria to guide the location of civic spaces in Merri-bek's key activity centres in a place-based way and complementary with the Streets for People approach in Council's Transport Strategy.*
- *Identifies locations for new or improved civic spaces to inform future land acquisition and capital works plans'.*

Shopping Strip Renewal Program

The Shopping Strip Renewal Program 2015- 2025 (SSRP) delivered a series of local economic development initiatives and urban design improvements to improve business performance and activate public spaces across neighbourhood shopping strips in Merri-bek. The Shopping Strip Renewal Program concluded in 2025 and going forward *Places for People* will provide the framework for delivering future upgrades to neighbourhood and local shopping strips.

2. Background

Places for People is Council's ten-year plan to create high-quality public spaces that enhance the vibrancy, sustainability, and liveability of Merri-bek's shopping strips and activity centres. Past public realm capital works programming in Merri-bek's major activity centres has been based on activity centre structure plans, which were developed between 2009 and 2012 and which, due to their long-term vision, have been delivered only in part. Improvements to neighbourhood centre shopping strips were delivered through the Shopping Strip Renewal Plan 2015-25.

Delivering on a key action in the *Open Space Strategy, Places for People* brings a refreshed view to planning for public spaces in activity centres and shopping strips. It identifies opportunities that align with other Council projects and programs and considers existing context including plans for the revitalisation of Central Coburg, the Level Crossing Removal Project and the Victorian Government Activity Centre program. The plan has two key objectives:

1. To define and outline our approach to public spaces in our major activity centres and neighbourhood and local shopping strips.
2. To identify priority public space projects to be targeted through Council's 10-year capital program.

Places for People provides Council with a clear, equitable plan for prioritising investment in activity centres and shopping strips. It will guide long-term capital works planning and inform annual capital works budget proposals. The program provides a list of opportunities while allowing flexibility to respond to emerging priorities or new funding opportunities. Other project opportunities may arise throughout the life of the program *Places for People* provides a set of criteria and design principles to help prioritise these.

3. Issues

Community impact

The Plan proposes a list of opportunities for improvements to public spaces in activity centres and shopping strips, providing better places for our community. *Places for People* includes principles that will guide the design of public spaces and streetscapes across Merri-bek, to ensure they maximise community impact and benefit. Through *Places for People*, our public spaces will be:

- Connected to Country – designed to care for Country and work towards healing Country.
- Safe – welcoming, socially inclusive, and safe for people of all ages, genders, backgrounds, and abilities.
- Accessible – contribute to Merri-bek's network of open spaces, active transport corridors, and public transit routes, ensuring accessibility and encouraging sustainable transport.
- Vibrant – engaging and beautiful destinations of public life, supporting the economic vibrancy of our city.
- Meaningful – reflect the culture and creativity of the surrounding community to create meaning and inspire community pride.
- Climate resilient – aim for climate-positive design and mitigate climate impacts on our city, contributing to a more liveable, resilient, and cooler urban environment.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Climate resilience is a key principle of the Plan requiring all projects to apply a future climate lens to public spaces including design responses that consider mitigation and adaptation. The opportunities identified in the draft plan will help to address the climate emergency and improve climate resilience in the public realm by:

- Increasing permeable surfaces and stormwater infiltration.
- Capturing, treating and reusing stormwater as a valuable resource.
- Increased planting and vegetation to support biodiversity in the city.
- New canopy tree planting for enhanced shade and urban cooling benefits.

- Use of materials and design responses that reduce extreme-heat impacts, reduce emissions and support a circular economy.

Economic sustainability implications

Vibrancy is a key principle of the Plan, which prioritises public space improvements in locations that support economic activity and street life. Attractive, welcoming and functional spaces encourage more people to visit, and stay longer in our activity centres, benefiting local businesses. Many of the opportunities identified create additional outdoor areas that businesses can use for trading, helping to further activate streetscapes.

The Plan's prioritisation criteria include the economic impact of the future opportunities. During the development of the plan, opportunities were assessed against the level of activation they would deliver, as well as the number of businesses and residents in the surrounding area.

An analysis of economic activity across Merri-bek's activity centres has informed the recommended distribution of capital investment in public realm improvements, to support an equitable approach to project allocation.

The Plan sits alongside Merri-bek's *Economic Development Action Plan* supporting the delivery of programs that directly impact local businesses while improving the public realm.

Legal and risk considerations

The Plan identifies opportunities to be delivered through Council's existing capital works program and annual budget process in alignment with existing processes and policies. Individual project plans including risk assessments will be conducted at the project stage and project delivery will be in alignment with Merri-bek's Project Management Framework.

Human Rights consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

Places for People supports the rights set out in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* by improving equitable access to safe, welcoming and accessible public spaces in Merri-bek's activity centres and shopping strips. In implementing the Plan, Council will act in alignment with human rights and consider relevant rights in decision-making, including freedom of movement, peaceful assembly and participation in public life, and cultural rights.

Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* Council has a duty to promote gender equality in policies, programs and services with a direct and significant impact on the community. An Intersectional-lens Gender and Equity Impact Assessment was prepared for this Plan. It highlighted the importance of improvements to the amenity, accessibility and safety of public spaces which have been addressed through the design principles and opportunities.

The importance of designing for cultural safety and with a Connection to Country was also identified in the assessment and reflected in the Plan. The assessment concluded that by ensuring the review and development of Council's public places are informed by the diverse needs of our community, we can improve accessibility, amenity and safety. This approach will better meet the needs of people of different genders and abilities, address gender inequality, and support the creation of socially and culturally inclusive places and spaces with a strong connection to Country.

These assessments will inform our planning, community engagement and implementation of all upcoming *Places for People* projects. During project development, project level gender impact assessments will also be conducted as appropriate.

4. Community consultation and engagement

In December 2025, Council endorsed a draft *Places for People* plan for community consultation. Community engagement was undertaken for 5 weeks from 12 February to 18 March 2026. A Community Engagement Summary is **Attachment 2** to this report.

Council has previously spoken to the community about their views on public spaces through the development of the Open Space Strategy 2024 and Coburg is Here 2026 and this feedback was also considered during development of the Plan.

The engagement was extensively promoted including hand delivered flyers to over 1,100 local businesses. The purpose of this community engagement was to provide the community with a chance to give feedback on the draft *Places for People* plan and share their thoughts on challenges and ideas around public spaces in Merri-bek. We heard from a diverse range of participants, including residents, workers, business owners, and young people. People provided feedback through the online survey, as part of workshops and presentations to community groups and in person at five pop-ups across Merri-bek.

Council officers met with Elders and representatives of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation who shared their knowledge on how to respectfully deliver projects on Country and the importance of cultural safety in public spaces.

The draft plan received general community support. Themes of the community feedback include:

- Connecting to Country
- Equity and distribution of public spaces
- Greening, shade and climate comfort
- Safety, accessibility and movement
- Balancing different needs in our activity centres
- Public space use, activation and social life
- Report clarity, terminology and communication
- Place-specific priorities and opportunities

Changes to the Plan based on community feedback

The following key changes have been made to the Plan based on community feedback:

- Document changes to make the plan easy to read and understand.
- Strengthened the Acknowledgement of Country section and added an additional Design Principle called “Connection to Country” following engagement with Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Elders.
- More emphasis on the design principles to justify decision making, design outcomes and project evaluation and ensure they reflect what the community wants to see in future public spaces.

- A Plans and Programs section has been added, linking to cross-organisational operational projects including social support, cleanliness/maintenance and outdoor dining permit processes, noting the importance of these functions in making great places for our community.
- A strategic and collaborative approach to shopping strip improvements for footpath renewal, street furniture renewal and street greening identified in the neighbourhood and local shopping strips section.
- Incorporation of a new small works program called “Local Places” across all centres
- Changes to the opportunities lists based on community feedback including:
 - Additional projects identified for Glenroy:
 - Short-term and long-term projects for Morgan Court
 - Wheatsheaf Road, Glenroy
 - Additional projects for Lygon Street/Nicholson Street:
 - Lygon Street / Albion Street intersection
 - Nicholson Street laneways project
 - O’Connor Street local place project
 - Changes to Sydney Road:
 - Added the Wilson Avenue/Sydney Road bouldering wall area
 - Bundled the exploration of improving Ballarat Street into Sparta Place precinct
 - Additional projects for Coburg:
 - Added Coburg Health Hub public space
 - Added Victoria Mall, Coburg
 - Removed the following:
 - Maternal child health on Lygon Street which is in another existing program of works
 - Champ Street, Coburg because there is no commercial frontage to this streetscape.

Affected persons rights and interests

A public exhibition period was implemented to allow all affected community members the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft plan. The changes to the document address the ideas and concerns of all affected persons where appropriate.

5. Officer declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and resources implications

The *Places for People* plan is not proposing significant new funding, but setting out a framework to help target and prioritise Council’s activity centre investments. The existing ten-year capital works program includes significant investment in activity centre projects. *Places for People* puts a framework around this existing allocation, helping to set annual priorities through the capital works program and annual budget. Opportunities identified for investigation will be further developed before consideration in the Capital Works program. The Plan looks at how Council prioritises allocations of funding to public spaces and provides a framework for transparency in our processes and decision making.

The Plan includes some Park Close to Home projects in activity centres. This program is funded and governed through the Park Close to Home framework and the Open Space Reserve; they are cross referenced in *Places for People* to give a holistic view to the community.

The Victorian Government has introduced an Infrastructure Contributions Plan (ICP) as part of the Activity Centre Program, which includes Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres. The proposed commencement date for the ICP is 1 July 2027. Council supports the introduction of a category-based and equitable contribution mechanism to fund infrastructure required to support growth in established urban areas. This includes infrastructure such as public realm improvements, sustainable transport and community infrastructure. The *Places for People* plan will help to identify and prioritise projects within the relevant priority infrastructure categories and support their delivery.

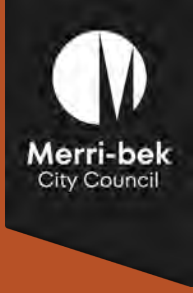
7. Implementation

Should *Places for People* be adopted by Council, the plan will be implemented through the following actions:

- Officers update the Conversations Merri-bek page and Council's website with *Places for People* and the Community Engagement Report.
- Opportunities from *Places for People* will be considered each year as part of Council's annual budget process.
- Community engagement will be undertaken on individual *Places for People* projects as they are developed.
- The implementation of projects will align with *Places for People* and Merri-bek's Project Management Framework.
- The Plan will be formally reviewed after approximately four years to ensure that *Places for People* remains relevant, reflects community needs, expectations, existing conditions, Council's financial resources and is responsive to any legislative changes.

Attachment/s

1 ↓	Places for People Plan	D26/212827
2 ↓	Places for People - Community Engagement Summary Report 2026	D26/212819



Places for People

Creating vibrant, connected public spaces across Merri-bek's activity centres and shopping strips

Final Draft





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Context

1. Connecting with Country

First Nations Peoples have cared for Country for thousands of years through cultural, ecological, and spiritual practices and knowledge.

Learning from Traditional Owners leads to better, more sustainable design, ensures cultural safety and visibility, and supports truth-telling and reconciliation.

Merri-bek City Council is committed to ensuring First Peoples' culture, knowledge, and heritage are respected and woven into the city's future.

Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.



Cultural heritage of Merri-bek

The area that makes up the City of Merri-bek rests on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

Pre-colonisation, Merri-bek was dominated by basalt volcanic plains, interspersed with grassy woodlands, open grasslands, and creek corridors. The most significant features were Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek, which provided reliable water, food resources, and movement corridors through the landscape. The area supported seasonal camps, food gathering, tool production, ceremony, and social exchange.

Merri-bek functioned as part of a broader living cultural landscape rather than as a fixed settlement, reflecting deep and enduring connections between people, land, and ecology.

Truth-telling and Reconciliation

European settlement rapidly disrupted and destroyed much of the cultural landscape that is now known as Merri-bek prior to 1835. Colonisation alienated Traditional Owners from their Country and from the resources upon which their traditional lives depended, resulting in devastating impacts on the health, population, and culture of First Nations Peoples and their Country.

Today, Council supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and is committed to working towards reconciliation through our Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of Merri-bek. The Statement includes commitments that form the basis for ongoing relationships between Elders and Merri-bek City Council.

Merri-bek takes a holistic Country lens to connect our activity centres to the broader regional landscape, through drawing on broader strategic work including the Yarra Strategic Plan (Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo).

The Places for People Plan aligns with the commitments and aims to work towards reconciliation.

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First Nations engagement insights

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges that the information provided by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people has helped inform Places for People.

Previous conversations and engagement with Traditional Owners and First Nations community members helped inform the Council's approach to the transformation of central Coburg. Traditional Owners have encouraged Council to also consider this knowledge and approach when planning more broadly for the Places for People Plan. Of the four areas of inquiry, the key opportunities under First Nations Culture and Public Space and Character can be applied to the design of public spaces in this plan and are incorporated into this work to ensure our public spaces honour, connect, and care for Country and First Nations culture.

Merri-bek City Council has undergone consultation with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners and representatives in the development of this plan. We will continue to work closely with the Traditional Owners in delivering the plan to ensure that future projects acknowledge and respect Wurundjeri Country.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Whole of Country Plan 2025 - 2035

The Whole of Country Plan sets out Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural objectives for managing Country. The Places for People Plan will align with this plan and its principles:

- Authenticity
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Future-focused
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Quality
- Resilience
- Respect
- Unity

How will this Places for People Plan connect with Country?

The Places for People Plan outlines design principles to guide the outcome of public space projects. The first principle is Connection to Country. This design principle is informed by information from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and emphasises the importance of:

- Engaging meaningfully with Traditional Owners on appropriate projects.
- Promoting language, culture, and knowledge sharing through place naming and signage.
- Healing Country through designs that reflect the historical ecology of the area.
- Planting endemic species.
- Creating connections to water in design and Water Sensitive Urban Design.
- Including First Nations public art.
- Providing space for community events.
- Ensuring public spaces are culturally safe for First Nations People.



2. Introduction

What is this Places for People Plan?

Places for People is Council’s 10-year plan to create high-quality public spaces that enhance the vibrancy, sustainability, and liveability of Merri-bek’s shopping strips and activity centres.

In this plan, public spaces include streets, plazas, laneways, pocket parks, footpaths, kerb extensions, areas of public seating, and landscaped streets.

Why do we need this plan?

Well-designed public spaces and streets provide residents and visitors with welcoming places to gather, rest, connect with others, and engage in the social and cultural life of our municipality.

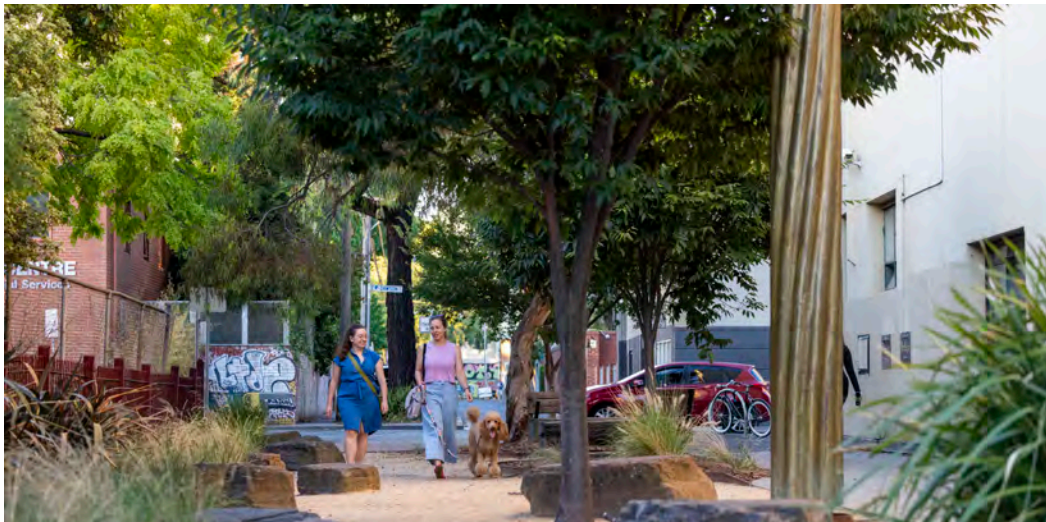
In Merri-bek, we require more and higher-quality public spaces to meet the needs of the growing population, support our local economy, respond to climate change, and address the lack of public spaces in our activity centres – as identified in the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

How will this plan deliver new and improved public spaces?

This plan will guide Council’s future investment in the public realm by identifying opportunities for new and improved public spaces, and in doing so, address key challenges and maximise the benefits of public space.

The plan has two key objectives:

1. To define and outline our approach to public spaces in our major activity centres and neighbourhood and local shopping strips.
2. To identify priority public space projects to be targeted through Council’s 10-year capital program.

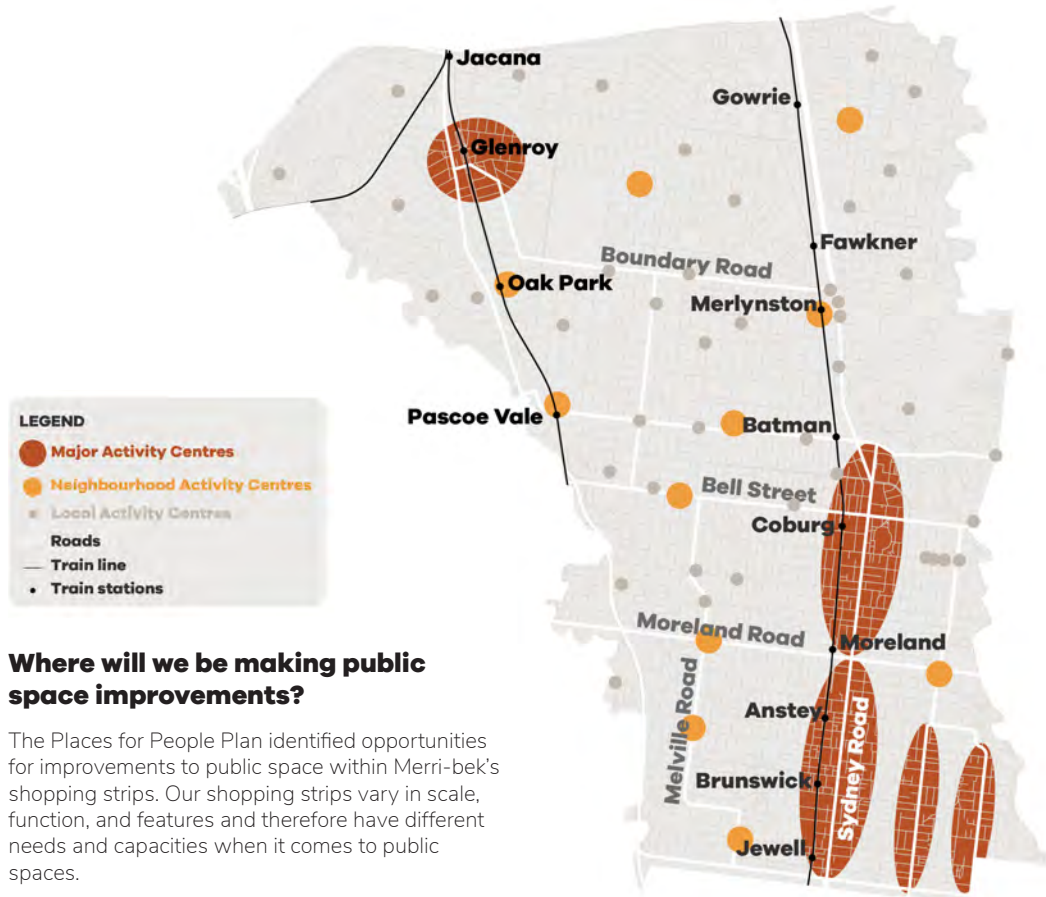


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Where will we be making public space improvements?

The Places for People Plan identified opportunities for improvements to public space within Merri-bek's shopping strips. Our shopping strips vary in scale, function, and features and therefore have different needs and capacities when it comes to public spaces.

The largest shopping strips are within our three major activity centres - Brunswick, Coburg, and Glenroy. These areas serve large catchments of people and provide a variety of shopping, dining, and entertainment offerings, as well as important community infrastructure, including health and education services.

Our neighbourhood and local shopping strips serve smaller catchments and provide various local services.

Public spaces, streets, and parks in residential areas or outside of shopping strips aren't included in the Places for People Plan.



3. Policy context

State Government context

Plan for Victoria

Plan for Victoria is the Victorian Government's 2025 vision for the future of Victoria. The plan outlines five pillars of action to deliver better housing, jobs, services, places, sustainability, and caring for Country across Victoria.

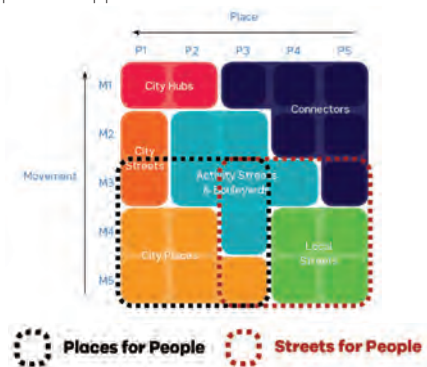
Places for People aligns with Pillar 3: Great places, suburbs, and towns. This pillar and our plan, aim to deliver public spaces that are community-centred, safe, inclusive, green, and support local business.

Movement and Place

Movement and Place in Victoria is a framework that guides and balances place and movement functions of streets. Developed by the Department of Transport and Planning, the framework keeps people and their needs at the centre of transport planning.

The framework is used to classify streets and their purpose. This is done by determining the movement function of a street on the scale of M1 (high movement) to M5 (low movement) and the place function of a street on the scale of P1 (state/national significance) to P5 (local significance).

Council has aligned both the Places for People and Streets for People plans with Movement and Place in Victoria, ensuring streets are designed with a people-first approach.



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Merri-bek Council Vision and Plan

Merri-bek leads and leaves no one behind. In 2035, we are a welcoming, safe, and thriving community. We are sustainable, and our environment is respected. Our community is engaged and informed. Our streets are full of life.

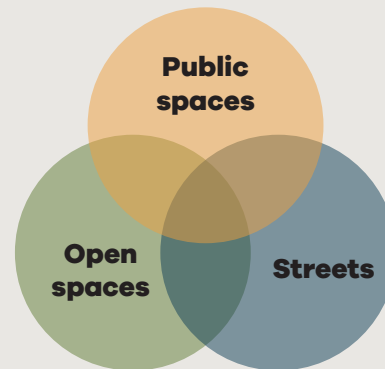
Places for People aligns with all five focus areas outlined in the Council Plan 2025-29, including:

- **Care for nature and climate resilience** by aiming to increase tree canopy cover and street greening, and implement Water Sensitive Urban Design through the Places for People opportunities.
- **Healthy and inclusive communities** by ensuring public spaces are accessible, comfortable, build connection and belonging, and encourage participation of people from diverse backgrounds.
- **Beautiful and liveable city** by creating well-maintained public spaces that add greenery, well-designed street furniture, and public art to our shopping areas.
- **Thriving economy and culture** by creating public spaces that support economic activity by attracting visitors and providing spaces that encourage people to stay longer around our shopping areas.
- **Engaging and responsible Council** by evaluating our new and improved public spaces to ensure they continue to deliver on community needs.

Planning for our public realm

The public realm refers to publicly owned, outdoor places that are open to everyone to move through, rest, recreate, and come together. Our public realm consists of our streets, public places, and open spaces. There is overlap in the way these aspects of our public realm function.

Council has a plan for each aspect of the public realm. Improvements to our streets are addressed in the Streets for People Plan, and improvements to our open spaces are in the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. This document, the Places for People Plan, focuses on improvements to our public spaces.



Streets for People Plan

Streets for People is Merri-bek's plan to create safer, more accessible, healthy, liveable, and inclusive streets for everyone.

The plan identifies streets that Council will target as Streets for People projects and outlines the process through which the projects will be delivered.

The plan focuses on streets and corridors with relatively lower movement functions, allowing them to play a stronger place role, with an emphasis on amenity and providing comfortable connections into activity centres.

Open Space Strategy

The Merri-bek Open Space Strategy provides direction for the future provision, planning, design, and management of Merri-bek's open space network.

The challenges identified in the strategy include increased pressure on existing open spaces, given the rise in resident and worker populations, and the presence of areas that are lacking open space.

Places for People will contribute to relieving pressure on existing open space and improving underserved areas within the activity centres by identifying opportunities for new and improved public spaces.

Park Close to Home

'A Park Close to Home' is a Council program that aims to create and improve access to open space in areas of Merri-bek with no parks in walking distance.

Shopping Strip Renewal Program

The Shopping Strip Renewal Program 2015-2025 (SSRP) delivered a series of local economic development initiatives and urban design improvements to improve business performance and activate public spaces across neighbourhood shopping strips in Merri-bek. The Shopping Strip Renewal Program concluded in 2025 and has been replaced by the Places for People Plan. This plan now provides the framework for delivering upgrades to neighbourhood and local shopping strips.

Other Council strategies

There are several other Council plans, strategies, and policies related to this plan, which are reflected in the opportunities and design principles. These include, but are not limited to:

- Climate Risk Strategy
- Climate Emergency Action Plan
- Economic Development Action Plan
- Merri-bek Human Rights Policy
- Urban Forest Strategy

4. Our People

Community engagement is essential to delivering projects that the community needs and wants.

How did we draft this plan?

This plan has been informed by Council's past strategic work on public space and community feedback, including from businesses and traders.

What have the community said about public spaces in Merri-bek?

Council has undertaken community engagement around public spaces as part of the Open Space Strategy 2024, Coburg is Here 2026, and this Places for People Plan 2026.

During the development of this plan, we heard from a diverse range of participants, including residents, workers, business owners, and young people. Various community needs and wants were identified through these projects and have shaped the focus of the Places for People Plan.

From the various engagement activities we understand that the community wants to see:

- More public space, especially given the growing population and increasing pressure on existing open spaces.
- Greater prioritisation of public space opportunities in areas with fewer existing spaces.
- Alignment between population growth, needs and future investment when planning for public spaces.
- More public space opportunities for Glenroy.
- More seating, shade, and weather protection.
- More trees and natural planting to improve biodiversity, more canopy cover, and urban cooling along busy and paved streets.
- Public spaces that are accessible to people of all abilities.
- Good connections between public spaces, streets, and transport.
- Balance between the needs of businesses, older people, people with disabilities, and servicing requirements.
- More space for pedestrians.
- Streets that are safe for all users.
- More spaces that provide for a range of activities and programming.
- More seating, lighting, water, public art, play elements, and outdoor dining.
- Clean and well-maintained streets.
- More public space for socialising.
- High-quality outcomes for public spaces.

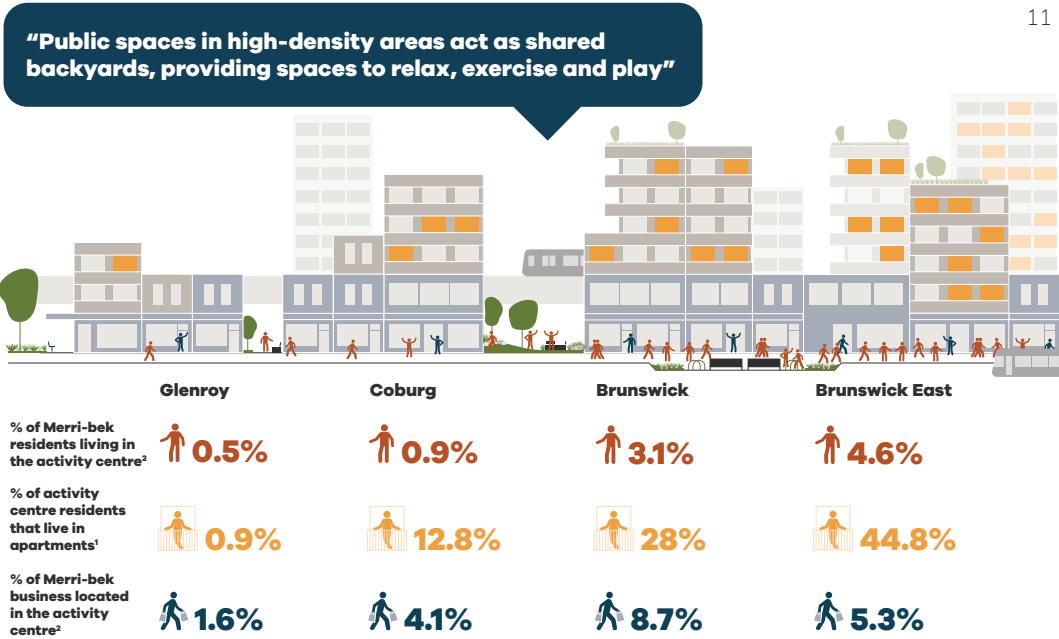


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¹Merri-bek Precinct Profiles, 2025 ²ABS Census, 2021



How do public spaces benefit the community?

High-quality spaces benefit the community and the environment by:

- Engendering a sense of community belonging, ownership, and civic pride.
- Improving community health and well-being through social connection and connection to nature and the outdoors.
- Supporting social and cultural interaction, reducing isolation, and helping people from different backgrounds feel included and safe.
- Benefiting the local businesses and economy by attracting visitors and providing space for activation.
- Contributing to a centre's identity and unique sense of place.
- Facilitating a range of events and activities, encouraging outdoor activity.
- Environmental benefits include stormwater capture, reuse, and infiltration through integrated water management, expanded tree canopy cover, increased biodiversity, and urban cooling.

5. Our Places

In Merri-bek we have four types of public spaces. Different types of public spaces function differently. They all have value in our community and, depending on their location and condition, need different things.



Forecourts

Forecourts mark the entry or gateway to a destination. These are usually co-located with key transport stops and community facilities, and provide space for waiting, resting, social gathering, and, in some cases, community events.

Forecourts help to activate spaces around buildings and train stations and can contribute to a sense of safety through lighting, clear sightlines, and the presence of people.



Gathering spaces

Gathering spaces are large public spaces that people seek out for social gatherings, cultural events, play, and rest. They are centrally located and designed for community use. These spaces can host a range of community events, including markets, performances, interactive activities, and cultural gatherings, all of which contribute to a sense of community and place identity.

These spaces are often landmarks for an area and contribute to a place's identity and character. Gathering spaces include civic squares, urban pocket parks, and pedestrian malls.

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Streetscapes

Streetscapes and pedestrian links within our activity centres are designed to prioritise the pedestrian experience in busy shopping areas with active frontages. Streetscapes have a high demand for pedestrian activities and lower levels of vehicle movement. They support and contribute to the pedestrian-friendly nature of a place by providing space for rest, infrastructure for safe movement via walking and cycling, and slower vehicular speeds. Streetscapes can directly support economic activity through active edges and providing space for outdoor dining.



Local places

Local places are small and meaningful public spaces. They may include a thoughtfully located seat near a tree or garden bed. They provide a place for people to stop and rest in the shade, as well as contribute to street greening. These spaces are often located in kerb outstands or on a wide footpath and are simple in design, with features such as landscaping and seating.

How to read the opportunities

The place-specific opportunities for public space improvements in our major activity centres are outlined on pages 16 - 23.

Each opportunity is tagged with a coloured circle to indicate whether the opportunity refers to a forecourt, gathering space, streetscape, or local place. The full circle indicates high priority projects, and the open circle indicates an opportunity to be explored.

Legend

-  Forecourt
-  Gathering space
-  Streetscape
-  Local place
-  High priority project
-  Opportunity to explore

Approach

6. Our Process

Places for People will be considered as a part of Council's 10-year Capital Works Program to ensure the coordination of this work and other project priorities. It follows Council's project management framework for capital works project delivery. As a part of this plan, opportunities have been assessed to identify priority projects. All priority projects will be developed in alignment with the design principles outlined on page 15.

Prioritisation

How do we prioritise projects in Brunswick, Coburg, and Glenroy?

Opportunities have been assessed to determine high priority projects and which require further investigation. The opportunities for Brunswick, Coburg, and Glenroy are assessed against the key themes below to determine which projects are feasible and most suitable to happen first. The program remains flexible to ensure that as our community's needs change, the program can be adaptable to changes as new opportunities arise. Opportunities are assessed through the following:



Value for money/time

Community impact

Economic impact

Strategic alignment

Environmental benefit

Ease of deliverability

Other factors



How do we prioritise projects in neighbourhood and local shopping strips?

The neighbourhood and local shopping strips are prioritised based on an assessment of conditions and constraints. The condition and constraints assessment considers factors including how recently the centre received capital investment, its economic health and the potential for revitalisation, street furniture and footpath quality, and the capacity for street greening.



Condition

Constraints

Other factors



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Design principles

Principles have been developed to guide the design of public spaces and streetscapes across Merri-bek.

Connection to Country



Public spaces should be designed to care for Country and work towards healing Country. Public spaces should include elements that acknowledge the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and ensure places are culturally safe for First Nations People.

Safe

Public spaces should be welcoming, socially inclusive, and safe for people of all ages, genders, backgrounds, and abilities. Design must consider security and perceptions of safety holistically. Design must aim to facilitate equitable use and everyone's sense of civic ownership and belonging in a public space.

Accessible

Public spaces should contribute to Merri-bek's network of open spaces, active transport corridors, and public transit routes, ensuring accessibility and encouraging sustainable transport. Public spaces should be well linked, easy to reach, and accessible to people of all abilities.

Meaningful

Public spaces should reflect the culture and creativity of the surrounding community to create meaning and inspire community pride. They should encourage people from diverse communities to meet, connect, and feel they belong. Design should cater to human comfort to create well-loved and used spaces.

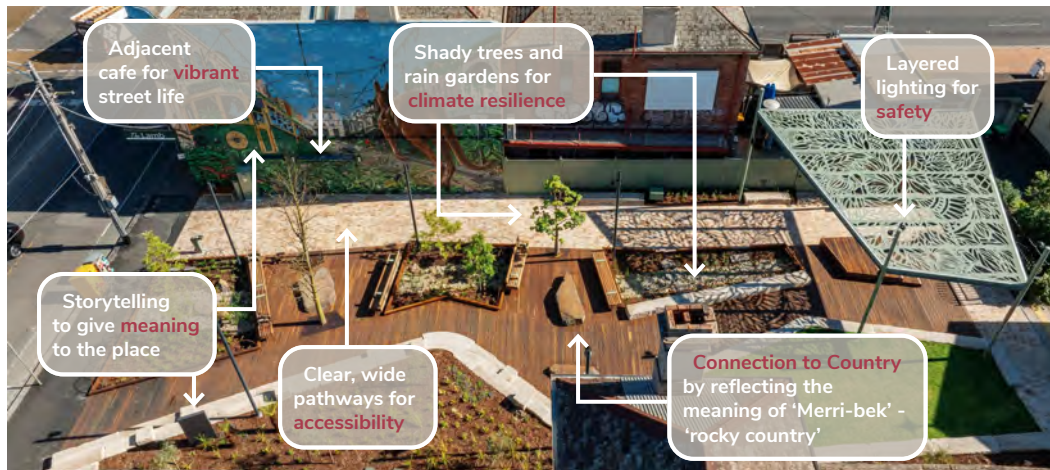
Vibrant

Public spaces should be engaging and beautiful destinations of public life, supporting the economic vibrancy of our city. They should vary in size and function, providing for a diverse variety of experiences and activity.

Climate resilient

Public spaces should aim for climate-positive design and mitigate climate impacts on our city, contributing to a more liveable, resilient, and cooler urban environment. Shade is essential to public life and is a basic condition for safe mobility.

What could this look like?



7. Delivering the Plan

Allocating investment

Around 70% of shops in Merri-bek are located in our major activity centres. These centres attract large numbers of visitors, connecting people to community infrastructure and services. The Brunswick, Coburg and Glenroy activity centres serve wide catchments of the community, whereas our smaller shopping strips tend to service local areas. The Places for People Plan recognises that the scale of the identified opportunities across different centres will relate to the scale of their potential community benefit.

The public space projects in major activity centres are naturally larger, more complex, and take longer to deliver. This plan considers the spaces within major activity centres individually and within the unique context and character of each major activity centre. The prioritisation criteria informs which projects are feasible and therefore a priority for consideration in Merri-bek’s Capital Works Program.

Our neighbourhood and local shopping strips also require investment in important day-to-day streetscape amenities such as street furniture and tree planting to ensure our local shopping strips are pleasant places to be and encourage locals to visit. This plan recommends upgrades continue to occur in these areas with consideration to the opportunities and constraints of each centre.

Additional programs and projects may be supported subject to external funding. Council will continue to pursue state and federal grants to support public realm improvements for the city.



Strategic implementation

Places for People will guide improvements in Merri-bek’s activity centres and streetscapes over the next ten years. Through Places for People, Council will invest funding into upgrading public spaces for our community. These works will improve the vibrancy, safety, and function of public space in our activity centres.

This program provides Council with a clear, equitable plan for prioritising investment. It will guide long-term capital works planning and inform annual budgets. The program provides a list of opportunities while allowing flexibility to respond to emerging priorities or new funding opportunities. Project opportunities may arise throughout the life of the program, and these will be assessed against the prioritisation criteria of Places for People in alignment with the design principles.

Places for People will be considered as a part of Council’s 10-year Capital Works Program to ensure the coordination of this work and other project priorities. It follows Council’s project management framework.

We will conduct community engagement on improvements on a project-by-project basis. The type of community engagement undertaken will be tailored to each project, factoring in the type of activity centre or shopping strip, the level of change being proposed, the annual budget process, and in conjunction with our Council Plan commitments.

This approach will ensure that Council can deliver on the program, yet still respond to factors that may affect delivery timelines, including cost escalations and feasibility study outcomes.

Opportunities from Places for People will be considered each year as a part of Council’s annual budget process. A formal review of the plan will be undertaken after four years to ensure the Places for People remains relevant, reflects community needs, expectations, existing conditions, Council’s financial resources, and is responsive to any legislative changes.

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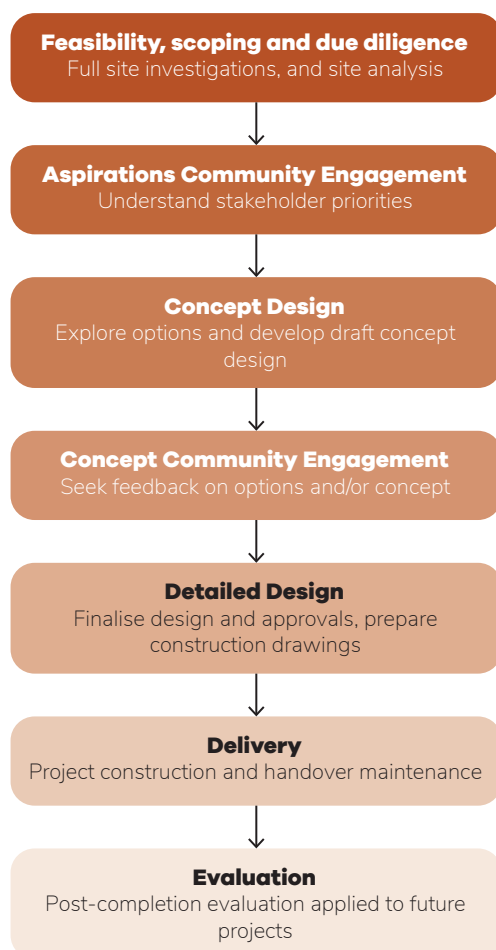
Opportunities

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Project implementation

The following flowchart provides an overview of the steps that will be followed for the implementation of individual projects or upgrades. As each project is unique and varies in scale and complexity, we will tailor this general approach to fit the needs of each project and its stakeholders.

Temporary spaces may also be created in parallel to this process to trial and test changes or interventions in simple and low-cost ways. This approach, known as 'tactical urbanism' can play an important role in creating more public space, activating underutilised land, and complementing the community engagement process.



Supporting implementation

In addition to the capital works and public space projects identified in this plan, which provide a vital element of the physical public realm, Council provides ongoing operational and community services that help to make our activity centres great places. These services and programs continue to evolve to meet the needs of our growing population and local economy, and undergo regular planning and review.

- **Merri-bek Economic Development Action Plan** which includes themes and actions to support businesses and the local economy, including in Merri-bek’s activity centres.
- **Merri-bek Public Place Service Improvement Plan** which outlines improvement initiatives for the most important services that help keep Merri-bek’s public spaces clean, safe and inviting.
- **Merri-bek Public Art and Murals Program** which guides the integration of public art in public spaces to beautify, engage, and excite.
- **Festivals, Events and Place Activation** which guides festivals, events, and place programming that activate Council’s public spaces, engage and connect the community, and support local businesses.
- **Transport Safety Programs** and initiatives to make streets and movement corridors safer for everyone, including upgrading crossings, speed limit reductions, and traffic calming strategies.
- **Social Cohesion Plan** which focuses on the ‘inclusive places and spaces’ theme to make our public places inclusive, culturally safe and welcoming for people from diverse backgrounds. It also supports community events, local activation, and gives underrepresented groups the chance to help shape and use these spaces.

8. Measuring success

How do we measure and evaluate change?

The Plan

Regular monitoring of the progress of the Places for People Plan will be undertaken as part of Council's Capital Works Program and Council's Operational Reporting.

Some of the measures we will report on are:

- Number of Places for People opportunities designed
- Number of programs delivered as identified in this Plan
- Improvements delivered in alignment with the Capital Works Program funding allocations
- Amount of external funding received for Places for People projects



Individual Places for People Projects

We will also evaluate each Places for People project that is delivered. There may be specific measures for individual projects, but generally, projects will be monitored by:

- Collecting qualitative data to understand how people feel about the project through meaningful community engagement, including trader sentiment surveys.
- Collecting quantitative data to understand how the places are being used. This may include vacancy rates of shops, footpath conditions, pedestrian counts, parking surveys, tree condition reports. Streetscape projects may also include Road Safety Audits, Healthy Streets Assessments, and crash statistics.

Each project will be assessed against the principles of the Places for People Plan, considering how it contributes to improving the following qualities of public space:

1. Connection to Country
2. Accessible
3. Vibrant
4. Safe
5. Meaningful
6. Climate resilient

Context

Approach

Opportunities



Opportunities





9. Brunswick Sydney Road

Today

Brunswick Activity Centre, centred on Sydney Road, is a vibrant and dense urban centre that reflects its creative, culturally diverse community. The built form is a mix of fine-grain heritage facades and high-density apartments, complemented by a small number of quality public spaces that provide residents and visitors with public space and community facilities. The civic heart around the Town Hall, Library, Counihan Gallery, Brunswick Baths, and Balam Balam Place is a hive of activity supported and enhanced by the surrounding precinct anchors.

The main shopping strip of Sydney Road is dominated by independent retailers, with an eclectic blend of arts venues, multicultural dining, and retail businesses. The Brunswick Design District and RMIT University anchor the creative activity evident in the galleries, businesses, and murals that add vibrancy to Brunswick. The commercial landscape is trending towards high quality dining experiences, retail, and services, with some specialty retail, notably the well-established Bridal precinct.

Despite its economic success, leading urban initiatives, and reputation as a creative and cultural destination, Sydney Road itself is dominated by vehicular traffic and is lacking in street greening and open space, while the narrow Upfield corridor and heavily utilised shared path feels cramped and congested.

In the future

The Brunswick Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP) will transform the Upfield corridor, linking neighbourhoods either side of the rail line, and creating a new, substantial open space corridor. The project will bring excellent opportunities for new public spaces aligned with the new and heritage stations, along with smaller urban pocket parks in the adjacent streets, as documented in Council's Upfield Urban Design Framework. Council will advocate for these spaces to be delivered as part of the LXRP.

As Sydney Road is state-owned with managed clearways, Council is limited in the level of change it can currently bring to the streetscape. Major state investment in accessible tram stops is desperately needed and will bring the opportunity to transform the corridor into a more vibrant and people-friendly street with ample space for greening and active street life. Council will continue to advocate for this Victorian Government investment in the whole Sydney Road corridor through this plan, see pages 28-29 for an overview of what Council will be advocating for through this plan.

In the meantime, the established, fine-grained urban fabric of Brunswick means that Council's approach in this corridor is to build upon the provision of smaller public spaces along the main activity street, to create a strong network of special spaces that provide welcome breaks in the built form, and frequent green and cool places of respite and connection.

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Opportunities for Brunswick, Sydney Road

-  The full circle indicates a high-priority project
-  The open circle indicates an opportunity to explore



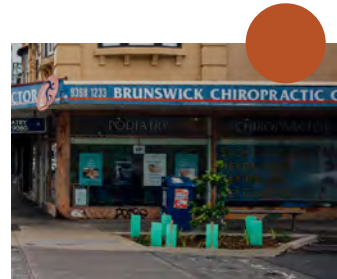
568 Sydney Road

Provide a new public park through the Park Close to Home program.



Sydney Road forecourts

Explore enlarging and upgrading existing forecourts at 682 Sydney Road and 797 Sydney Road.



Local places

Explore opportunities for projects along Sydney Road to improve street greening and walkability.



Wilson Avenue

Explore upgrading the Wilson Avenue bouldering wall area.



Sparta Place precinct

Explore the potential to improve Sparta Place.



Pedestrian Link to Frith St

Explore upgrading the Council-owned laneway to provide a pedestrian link to Frith Street Park.

Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework

Council has developed an Upfield Corridor Design Framework to have more of a say on what the Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP) will look like in Brunswick. The framework includes draft concept plans for various opportunities that extend the benefits of the LXRP beyond the rail corridor through small public spaces and streetscape projects.

The intention is that the opportunities will be delivered over multiple years, either during or after the completion of the LXRP. The opportunities include new public spaces and streetscapes.





10. Brunswick Lygon & Nicholson St

Today

The Lygon Street and Nicholson Street corridors are diverse in their offering and character, and therefore require different approaches when it comes to public spaces and the public realm.

Lygon Street is a long shopping strip with a variety of modern restaurants, local bars, local supermarkets, and shops. At the southern end of Lygon Street, the vibrant dining area is supported by wide footpaths, kerb outstands, and minor street greening.

Towards the north of Lygon Street, around high-density developments, and local service businesses, the footpaths are narrower, and the street greening is very limited. Off the main corridor, however, there is considerable open space, including Methven Park and Fleming Park.

Nicholson Street is a more fragmented spine with pockets of commercial activity amongst stretches of residential homes, contributing to low levels of street activation. There is a mix of cafes and local services that cater more to residents over visitors to the area. The recently completed East Brunswick Village has established a commercial anchor that provides a large supermarket as well as entertainment, retail, and dining services.

In the future

There is a key opportunity to capitalise on the success of the southern section of Lygon Street through upgrading the streetscape to provide improved pedestrian amenity, street greening, and new public spaces. This area is likely to continue to attract traders offering quality dining experiences and boutique retail.

Opportunities in the northern section of Lygon Street are limited by the narrow footpaths. Council is advocating for accessible tram stops to deliver wider footpaths, frequent pedestrian crossings, and new space for greening to contribute to a better public realm. There is some opportunity to create new public spaces within side streets in this section of the corridor. Council is currently trialling reduced speeds to 30 km/h on the Lygon Street corridor and will continue to advocate for reduced speeds on Nicholson Street.

Given the dominance of housing and lack of continuous shopping strips, Nicholson Street is unlikely to develop into a continuous spine of activity, and it is anticipated that new residential development is more likely to be medium-density housing on existing residential lots. East Brunswick Village is evolving into a larger precinct and defines somewhat of a shift from a residential to a mixed-use area.

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Opportunities for Lygon and Nicholson Street, Brunswick

- The full circle indicates a high-priority project
- The open circle indicates an opportunity to explore



Dining precinct

Upgrade the south of Lygon Street streetscape.



Local places

Explore opportunities for small projects on side streets to improve street greening and walkability.



Future parks

Investigate land purchasing opportunities for gathering spaces through Park Close to Home.



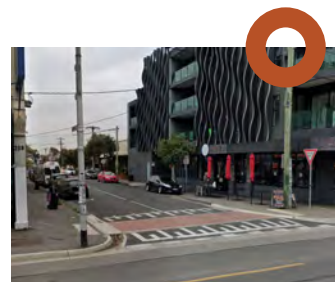
Lygon Street/Albion Street

Explore the potential for improvements to pedestrian amenity at Lygon Street/Albion St.



Piera Street

Explore the potential for improvements to pedestrian spaces in Piera Street.



Jarvie Street

Explore the potential for improvements to pedestrian spaces in Jarvie Street.



O'Connor Street

Explore the potential for improvements to pedestrian spaces in O'Connor Street.



Nicholson Street laneways

Explore opportunities for improving the pedestrian amenity of laneways off Nicholson Street.



11. Coburg

Today

Coburg is a unique and evolving activity centre that reflects the cultural diversity and rich history of the area. Rows of heritage shopfronts sit alongside light industrial buildings on Sydney Road, larger commercial buildings and car parking occupy the centre, while high-density apartments stand on the historic Pentridge Prison site.

The heart of Coburg is somewhat fragmented with the civic anchors being spread out from the buzz of the multicultural food and retail offerings on Sydney Road and Victoria Mall. The large areas of surface parking between Sydney Road and the station create a barrier to the walkability of the centre. At the southern end of Sydney Road there is a lack of cohesion due to the mix of building types. This reduces the walkability of the area as commercial destinations are limited and widely spaced. Sydney Road Coburg is increasingly becoming a destination for jewellery shopping, contributing to an evolving commercial identity.

The quality of public realm varies across the activity centre. Successful initiatives range from the iconic Victoria Mall to smaller interventions such as the Dunnes Lane pedestrian link, providing a key connection to Coburg Leisure Centre and Bridges Reserve. The same limitations relating to Sydney Road itself, and the need for accessible tram stops outlined previously, apply through Coburg.

In the future

Central Coburg will undergo significant transformation as outlined in the framework for central Coburg. The new Coburg Library and Piazza will establish the heart of Coburg and provide a stage for public life to better connect the centre and the community. This catalyst project, along with the future of the Council owned sites, will deliver a variety of significant public realm improvements.

The new Coburg Health Hub on Urquhart Street will also attract many visitors in need of quality public space, and significantly intensify the level of activity around the civic centre. Coburg is beginning to see some high-density development along the Sydney Road corridor, and with growing pressure on housing supply, it is likely that development will increase given the opportunities that larger commercial sites offer. This development should create a more consistent street wall and fine-grain commercial interface, leading to a more activated and walkable spine.

With the anticipated density, it is essential that public realm improvements keep up to accommodate the growing residential population, and public spaces are provided for rest, gathering, and play. This plan identifies streetscape upgrades, public space upgrades, and street closures that provide opportunities to create new and improved public spaces to support the community and economy in Coburg.

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Opportunities for Coburg

-  The full circle indicates a high-priority project
-  The open circle indicates an opportunity to explore



Victoria Mall

Undertake short-term improvements to Victoria Mall. To be delivered in 2026-27.



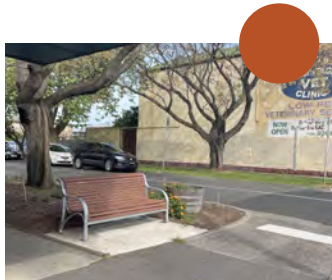
Urquhart Street

Upgrade Urquhart streetscape, linking Coburg Health Hub, the Civic Centre, and schools.



Coburg Health Hub

New gathering space to be delivered through Coburg Health Hub development.



Local places

Explore opportunities for small projects on side streets to improve street greening and walkability.



Civic Centre forecourt

Explore upgrade of the existing forecourt at the Civic Centre.



Carron and Allen Street

Explore the potential for improvements to pedestrian spaces in Carron and Allen streets.

Central Coburg

Council will be delivering a range of public realm projects through the program for central Coburg. The framework for Coburg outlines opportunities for new public spaces and streetscapes across central Coburg. The new Coburg Library and Piazza are underway and serve as the catalyst project for a range of public realm upgrades outlined in the framework. Opportunities for upgrading key streetscapes and new pedestrian links include Louisa Street and Waterfield Street, Victoria Street and Victoria Street Mall, Russell Street, as well as new streets and laneways.





12. Glenroy

Today

Glenroy provides a variety of retail and hospitality. The area is evolving as a multicultural hub, with businesses reflecting the variety of cultural communities that live in Glenroy. The pedestrian experience is hindered by the significant surface car parking and high volumes of vehicular traffic along Pascoe Vale Road and Glenroy Road that run through the core of the centre.

Wheatsheaf Road and Post Office Place are important local shopping strips that provide a mix of cafes, small restaurants, and local services. These strips are walkable and provide some greening. The pedestrian experience on Pascoe Vale Road is unwelcoming, as traffic dominates and there is limited greenery. The lack of public transport and limited crossing points further reduces the walkability and connectivity of the centre. Glenroy Road provides a similar experience, and Council is advocating to the Victorian Government to improve these conditions on both major roads.

The Glenroy Hub is a well-used, key community facility that provides valued services and hosts a variety of great community events that bring vibrancy to Glenroy, notably the annual Glenroy Festival. Access to the hub could be improved to provide a better connection to the core of Glenroy. Council is advocating for improved road safety on Plumpton Avenue.

The renewal of Glenroy Station through the Level Crossing Removal Project has provided high-quality public space and greening to Glenroy.

In the future

Glenroy is yet to experience considerable development that transforms existing large private sites into mixed-use developments that contribute to the commercial activity of the centre.

The Coles site presents a car park to the Glenroy Road frontage and a blank wall to Morgan Court. This site has the potential to introduce active edges, more street life, and residential and commercial activity. Similarly, the key site to the east of the station represents a great opportunity for a mixed-use development incorporating new public space and activated pedestrian links adjacent to the station and along Hartington Street.

For major transformations to be successful in Glenroy, it is critical that pedestrian infrastructure, such as appropriate crossing points, are considered and complement public realm projects. Until some of these key sites change, the approach in Glenroy is to focus on those streets which offer high potential for pedestrian amenity and street life due to the adjacent built form, lower levels of traffic, and proximity to the station.



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Opportunities for Glenroy

-  The full circle indicates a high-priority project
-  The open circle indicates an opportunity to explore



Wheatsheaf Road

Upgrade Wheatsheaf Road. Project to be completed by 2027.



Morgan Court Activation

Undertake minor improvements to Morgan Court. Small upgrades will be delivered in 2026-27.



Post Office Place

Upgrade Post Office Place streetscape.



Glenroy Station forecourts

Explore the potential to upgrade the station forecourts around Glenroy Station.



Belair Avenue

Explore the potential for a new local place at Belair Avenue.



Local places

Explore opportunities for small projects on side streets to improve street greening and walkability.



Morgan Court streetscape

Explore the potential to upgrade streetscape south of the Morgan Court public space.



Pascoe Vale Road

Explore the potential to upgrade the pedestrian areas of Pascoe Vale Road.



13. Neighbourhood and local shopping strips

Neighbourhood shopping strips

Neighbourhood shopping strips have a mix of uses to meet the daily and weekly needs of the local community. In Merri-bek there are 12 neighbourhood shopping strips. This can include shops, services, supermarkets, small businesses, and cafes.

These centres:

- Serve a smaller number of residents, within a largely residential neighbourhood - 8,000 to 10,000 residents
- Have between 20 and 60 shop fronts
- Cover smaller areas, typically one to two city blocks
- Play an important role in providing medical/ health and community services and a place to meet and socialise in the local area.

Some examples of neighbourhood shopping strips include Bonwick Street in Fawkner and Melville/ Moreland Road in Brunswick West.

Upgrades are anticipated to include street furniture renewal and enhanced greening including new street trees wherever space allows.

The allocation between centres will be considered annually through the adoption of the Capital Works Program.

Local shopping strips

Local shopping strips provide access to small local shopping services. These centres serve the daily convenience needs of nearby residents and often include a small convenience store and services such as dry cleaners, hairdressers, and coffee shops. There are 43 local shopping strips.

These centres:

- Serve nearby residents for their daily convenience
- Vary in size from just a couple of shopfronts in a local street to a block or two of shops in a residential neighbourhood
- Have between 2 and 20 shop fronts
- Form part of the local urban fabric, creating street life and activity within our neighbourhoods.

Some examples of local shopping strips include Coonans Road in Pascoe Vale South and North Street in Hadfield.

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Approach

Opportunities

Opportunities for neighbourhood and local shopping strips

- The full circle indicates a high-priority project
- The open circle indicates an opportunity to explore



Better footpaths

Upgrade footpaths and roads for community safety and accessibility.



Better greening

Increase street greening for example in East Street.



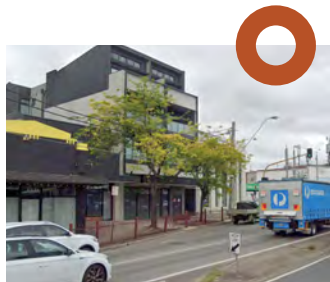
Better street furniture

Install new public seating and improve existing public seating.



West Street

Streetscape upgrade project to be completed by 2027.



Bell Street/Melville Road

Explore opportunities to improve pedestrian amenity.



Melville Road/Albion Street

Explore opportunities to improve pedestrian amenity and increase street greening.



Grantham/Union Street

Explore opportunities to improve pedestrian amenity and public art

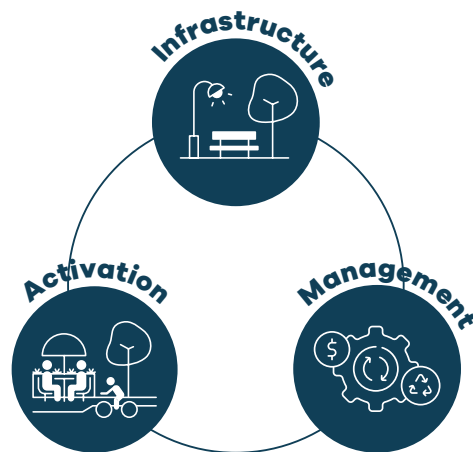


The importance of planning

For public spaces to function well, activation and the management of a space are essential beyond the physical infrastructure. Even if a space is designed with good infrastructure, it is essential that people use the space (activation) and that it is well-maintained, clean, and complies with Council policies and permits (management).

This plan identifies opportunities for new and improved plans and programs to better activate, manage, and improve our public spaces beyond the place-based opportunities.

There are many other programs and plans currently in place that work well to support the activation and management of our public spaces, see page 31.



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Opportunities for plans and programs



Streetscape guidelines

Develop streetscape guidelines to guide the design and material standards of our streets.



Shop front renewal

Continue to work with businesses to improve their shop fronts and outdoor dining areas.



Footpath Trading review

Review and improve the Footpath Trading Guidelines to be clear and easy to understand for traders.



Tactical Urbanism

Refine the process for planning and implementing public space trials and new ideas.



Maintenance & cleanliness

Deliver quality street cleansing and maintenance to keep our public spaces at their best.



Public space on private land

Explore opportunities to partner and deliver new and improved public spaces on private land.



Social support

Work to protect dignity and provide support for people experiencing homelessness or ill mental health.



Inclusive places & spaces

Deliver the socially inclusive places and spaces in line with the Social Cohesion Plan.



Asset renewal

Deliver quality street furniture, footpath renewal and urban forest creation and maintenance.



15. Advocacy

Advocating for change

Advocacy is essential for making change across our municipality on roads and areas that are not within Council’s jurisdiction.

Council advocates and works with governing bodies whose decision making impacts our community to maximise the benefits of their project and programs and deliver on community aspirations.

Through this plan, we heard a range of ideas from our community for improving some of the major state-owned corridors in Merri-bek. This plan outlines advocacy opportunities to work towards achieving these improvements.

What needs to change?

The characters of the Brunswick, Coburg, and Glenroy activity centres are dominated by the linear nature of our main activity streets, Sydney Road, Lygon Street, and Pascoe Vale Road.

The physical form of these streets is often constrained by the tramlines managed by Yarra Trams and the associated clearways managed by the Department of Transport and Planning. These clearways mean that the existing narrow footpaths can’t currently be widened to make additional space for pedestrians and street greening.

Both Sydney Road and Lygon Street require accessible tram stops to serve the needs of our community, and this is a major advocacy agenda

for Council. Once achieved, the introduction of accessible tram stops will transform the configuration and character of these streetscapes.

Until the Victorian Government invests in accessible tram stops or transforms clearways, Council is limited in the changes it can make to footpath widths and tree planting along Sydney Road, Lygon Street, and Pascoe Vale Road. Given these limitations, our interim approach is to:

- Maximise greening opportunities adjacent to major roads through a continuing program of local places, as outlined on pages 17, 19, 21, and 23.
- Focus on improvements in local streets leading to major roads to enhance the movement network to reach these centres, as outlined in the Streets for People Plan.
- Advocate to the Victorian Government for improved pedestrian crossing times and frequency to aid pedestrian movement and connectivity across these streets.
- Improve the amenity of Sydney Road through focused cleansing, street furniture renewal, and decluttering of footpaths by the removal of redundant signs and infrastructure through the ‘Love Sydney Road’ program.
- Continue to advocate and implement 30 km/h speed limits on major roads as trialled on Lygon Street.

Context

Approach

Opportunities



Opportunities for advocacy



Sydney Road

Advocate for better pedestrian amenity, street greening, and lower speed limits.



Accessible tram stops

Advocate for accessible tram stops on Sydney Road and Lygon Street.



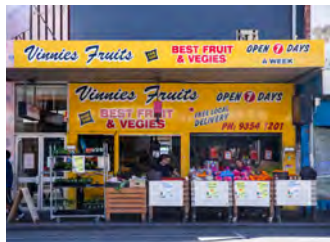
Pascoe Vale Road

Advocate for better pedestrian amenity, street greening and lower speed limits.



LXRP

Advocate for maximising the public space opportunities and improving east-west links.



Better access to shops

Advocate for the removal of step entries to improve accessibility to shops for mobility device users.



Speak with us in your language  For more information visit merri-bek.vic.gov.au/your-language

Per maggiori informazioni nella tua lingua, chiama il numero 9280 1911	اپنی زبان میں مزید جاننے کے لیے پر کال کریں۔ 9280 1917	如需了解更多您语言版本的信息, 请致电 9280 0750	अपनी भाषा में अधिक जानने के लिए, 9280 1918 पर कॉल करें
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Places for People

Community Engagement Summary

April 2026



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Introduction

We are refining our plan to deliver new and improved public spaces across our activity centres and shopping strips in Merri-bek.

What is the Places for People Plan?

Places for People is Council's 10-year plan to create high-quality public spaces that enhance the vibrancy, sustainability, and liveability of Merri-bek's shopping strips and activity centres.

In the plan, public spaces include streets, plazas, laneways, pocket parks, footpaths, kerb extensions, areas of public seating, and landscaped streets.

Why do we need a Places for People Plan?

Well-designed public spaces and streets provide residents and visitors with welcoming places to gather, rest, connect with others, and engage in the social and cultural life of our municipality.

In Merri-bek, we require more and higher-quality public spaces to meet the needs of the growing population, support our local economy, respond to climate change, and address the lack of public spaces in our activity centres – as identified in the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

How will Places for People deliver new and improved public spaces?

This plan will guide Council's future investment in the public realm by identifying opportunities for new and improved public spaces, and in doing so, address key challenges and maximise the benefits of public space.

The plan has two key objectives:

1. To define and outline our approach to public spaces in our major activity centres and Neighbourhood and Local shopping strips.
2. To identify priority public space projects to be targeted through Council's 10-year capital program.

Purpose of this engagement

The purpose of this community engagement was to provide the community with a chance to give feedback on the draft Places for People Plan and share their thoughts on challenges and ideas around public spaces in Merri-bek.

The engagement ran for five weeks from Thursday 12 February to Wednesday 18 March



Executive Summary

Merri-bek City Council undertook community engagement to inform the development of the draft Places for People Plan, Council's 10-year plan to guide investment in public spaces across activity centres and shopping strips. The engagement provided opportunities for the community to share feedback on the draft Plan's vision, priorities, design principles and identified public space opportunities. Feedback was gathered through online surveys, written and email submissions, in-person pop-ups and discussions with community and advisory groups. Overall, the engagement demonstrated strong community interest in the future of public spaces across Merri-bek and broad support for the intent of the Places for People Plan.

What we heard

There was general community support for the Places for People Plan. Across all engagement methods, several consistent themes emerged.

Equity in public space provision was a recurring message. Some participants expressed concern about unequal distribution of public spaces across Merri-bek, particularly noting that some activity centres, including Glenroy, have fewer existing public spaces and fewer future opportunities identified. These participants called for clearer prioritisation and greater focus on areas with higher need or historic under-investment.

Greening, shade and climate comfort were consistently identified as priorities. Community members emphasised the importance of trees, canopy cover and planting to make public spaces cooler, more comfortable and more inviting, particularly in heavily paved areas.

Safety, accessibility and movement were highlighted as essential to successful public spaces. Feedback focused on pedestrian safety, traffic speeds, accessibility for people of all abilities, and the need for clear, well-connected routes between public spaces, streets and transport.

Balancing different needs in activity centres was a frequent topic. Many participants supported exploring opportunities to improve the experience of activity centres for people, while also emphasising the importance of maintaining access for those who rely on driving, including businesses, servicing, older people and people with disabilities.

Participants also emphasised the importance of **public spaces that support everyday use** and social connection, with calls for seating, shade, lighting, toilets and activation, as well as improved maintenance and cleanliness. Place-specific feedback identified underutilised streets, laneways and residual spaces as opportunities for improvement.

When speaking to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders we were advised on various strategies to design **public spaces that respect, care and connect to Country**.

How this feedback will be used

Community feedback will be used to refine the draft Places for People Plan, including:

- Reviewing identified **opportunities and priorities** to better balance public space investment across the municipality, particularly for Glenroy.
- Refining **design principles** to more closely reflect what the community wants to see in future public spaces
- Including opportunities for **stronger collaboration across Council** to better plan, deliver and maintain public spaces over time
- Reviewing the **structure and content of the report** to improve clarity, readability and strengthen the First Nations connection.

The final Places for People Plan will be presented to Council for consideration following completion of the engagement process.

How we promoted the engagement

The engagement was promoted via various methods and channels including:

- Conversations Merri-bek
- 5 x In-Person pop-ups
- Feature in My Merri-bek e-newsletter
- Feature in Business Merri-bek e-newsletter
- 1,125 flyers delivered to local businesses
- Social media posts
- Display screens
- Printed posters in Brunswick Library, Coburg Library and the Glenroy Hub
- Emails/presentations to various Council reference groups including:
 - Community Connectors
 - Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee
 - Disability Reference Group
 - Gender Equality Reference Group
 - LGBTIQ+ Reference Group
 - Merri-bek Arts Advisory Committee
 - Older Persons Reference Group
 - Transport Advisory Committee
 - Liveability Advisory Committee
 - Merri-bek Youth Ambassadors
 - Merri-bek Multicultural Network
 - Fawkner Futures
 - Interfaith network
 - Central Coburg Business Association
 - Sydney Road Business Association
 - First Nations Elders

Reach

2,478 Views	1,811 Visits	1,334 Visitors	46 Contributions	44 Contributors	54 Followers
<p>Views - The number of times a Visitor views any page on a Site. Visits - The number of end-user sessions associated with a single Visitor. Visitors - The number of unique public or end-users to a Site. A Visitor is only counted once, even if they visit a Site several times in one day. Contributions - The total number of responses or feedback collected through the participation tools. Contributors - The unique number of Visitors who have left feedback or Contributions on a Site through the participation tools. Followers - The number of Visitors who have 'subscribed' to a project using the 'Follow' button.</p>					

Who we heard from

The draft Places for People Plan received feedback through a mix of online, in-person and written engagement methods.

Demographic information reported in this section is based on self-reported data from registered participants on the Conversations Merri-bek platform. All demographic questions were optional and may not have been completed by all participants. Demographic information was not formally collected during in-person engagement activities.

Conversations Merri-bek

Between 12 February and 18 March 2026, the online engagement hosted on Conversations Merri-bek recorded:

- 67 registered participants
- 46 total contributions
- 44 contributors
- 54 followers

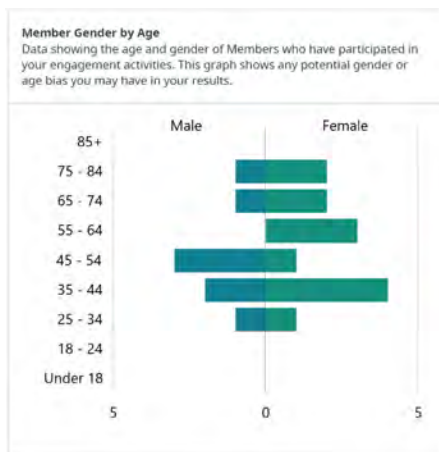
Gender

Participants identified across a range of gender identities. The reported gender responses included:

- Woman / woman-identified (16)
- Man / man-identified (12)
- Gender diverse (1)
- Prefer not to say (5)
- Prefer not to self-identify (1)
- Man (9)
- Woman (13)

Age

Participants represented a range of age groups, based on self-reported age categories selected during online registration.



Suburb

Contributors to the online engagement were primarily residents of Merri-bek, based on self-reported residential location in member profiles.

The highest number of contributors were from:

- Glenroy (19)
- Brunswick North (6)
- Coburg (6)
- Lygon Street North (4)
- Brunswick South (2)
- Fawkner East (2)

Additional contributions were received from several other suburbs within and surrounding Merri-bek.

In-person pop-ups

Council officers spoke directly with community members at a series of in-person pop-ups held across Merri-bek. Feedback was captured through written comments on sticky notes.

In total, Council spoke with approximately 88 people across five locations:

- Glenroy (Morgan Court) – 18 people
- Brunswick (Michelle Guglielmo Park) – 25 people
- Brunswick West (Melville / Moreland Road) – 22 people
- Fawkner (Bonwick Street) – 8 people
- Brunswick East (Lygon Street) – 15 people

Some participants provided feedback on more than one sticky note. As a result, the number of written comments is greater than the number of people spoken with. Demographic information was not formally collected through these engagement methods.

Written and email submissions

In addition to responses submitted through the online survey, community members provided more detailed feedback through written submissions.

Council received:

- 3 written submissions uploaded via the online survey
- 10 submissions received via email

These submissions were included in the qualitative analysis alongside survey responses.

Community and advisory group engagement

Council also presented the draft Places for People Plan to several community and advisory groups, where participants shared feedback through discussion and written comments.

Groups engaged included:

- Merri-bek Youth Ambassadors
- Fawkner Futures
- Liveability Advisory Committee
- Community Connectors

Individual demographic information was not collected during these sessions, except for the Community Connectors group, as outlined below.

Community Connectors

Fifteen members of the Community Connectors group participated in discussions on the draft Places for People Plan.

Collectively, participants reported speaking a range of community languages, including:

- Arabic
- Bangla
- Farsi
- Greek
- Hindi
- Italian
- Spanish
- Turkish
- Urdu
- Vietnamese

Community Connectors who participated lived in and worked across several areas of Merri-bek, including:

- Fawkner
- Glenroy
- Coburg
- Pascoe Vale
- Brunswick

What we heard

The community shared feedback on the draft Places for People Plan through a combination of online surveys, written and email submissions, in-person pop-ups and discussions with community and advisory groups.

Across all engagement methods, feedback was largely consistent and focused on equity, greening, safety, how public spaces are prioritised, and how clearly the Plan communicates its intent.

Key themes across all engagement

Connection to Country

Through meeting with Traditional Owner Elders, we were advised on what the Places for People Plan needs to consider when designing public spaces that are respectful and caring of Country. This included:

- Engaging meaningfully with Traditional Owners on appropriate projects
- Promoting language, culture, and knowledge sharing through place naming and signage
- Healing Country through designs that reflect the historical ecology of the area
- Planting endemic species
- Creating connections to water in design and Water Sensitive Urban Design
- Including First Nations public art
- Providing space for community events
- Ensuring public spaces are culturally safe for First Nations People

Equity and distribution of public spaces

Equity in the distribution of public spaces and investment was one of the strongest themes across all engagement methods.

Some participants expressed concern that some activity centres, particularly Glenroy, have significantly fewer public spaces compared with other areas. Feedback noted that:

- Glenroy has fewer existing civic and public spaces
- The draft Plan identifies fewer new public space opportunities in Glenroy compared with other major activity centres
- This was perceived by some as reinforcing long-standing disparities in public amenity

Participants called for:

- Greater prioritisation of new and improved public spaces in areas with fewer existing spaces
- Alignment between population growth, need and future investment

These concerns were raised consistently through surveys, written submissions, pop-ups and community group discussions.

Greening, shade and climate comfort

Greening and climate comfort featured prominently across all feedback. Community members consistently highlighted:

- The need for more trees and canopy cover, particularly along busy and heavily paved streets
- The importance of shade, grass, gardens and planted areas to improve comfort and usability
- Concerns about heat, hard surfaces and lack of green relief in activity centres

Greening was frequently linked to:

- Climate resilience and cooling
- Health and wellbeing
- Creating more attractive and welcoming places to spend time

Participants also shared positive feedback about existing green spaces and streets where greening has already been implemented.

Safety, accessibility and movement

Safety and accessibility were raised as essential to making public spaces usable and inclusive. Key issues included:

- Traffic speeds and vehicle dominance reducing pedestrian comfort and safety
- The need for safer and more frequent pedestrian crossings
- Challenges accessing public spaces with prams, wheelchairs or mobility aids
- Safety concerns in station precincts, laneways and less well-lit areas

Participants emphasised that:

- Public spaces need to be accessible to people of all abilities
- Good connections between public spaces, streets and transport are critical
- Places for People should work closely with Streets for People and active transport networks to avoid unintended barriers

Balancing different needs in activity centres

Many participants discussed how space is shared in activity centres and shopping strips. Feedback included:

- Concerns about congestion and parking pressures, including the impacts of double parking
- Interest in improving comfort and amenity through better pedestrian spaces, greening and places to spend time
- Recognition that any changes need to continue supporting access for people who drive, including businesses, older people, people with disabilities and servicing requirements.

Overall, participants highlighted the importance of carefully balancing different needs so activity centres work well for drivers and businesses, while also being welcoming and enjoyable places for everyone.

Public space use, activation and social life

Participants placed strong value on public spaces that support everyday use and social connection. Feedback highlighted the importance of spaces that:

- Are comfortable and welcoming, not just places to pass through
- Support sitting, eating, meeting, resting and spending time
- Cater to a range of age groups, including children, young people, families and older residents

Suggestions included:

- More seating, shade, lighting and water fountains
- Small-scale play elements and public art
- Outdoor dining, events and temporary activations
- Better maintenance and cleanliness to support regular use

Many participants shared positive examples of existing public spaces and expressed interest in building on what is already working well.

Report clarity, terminology and communication

Some participants provided feedback directly on the draft Plan itself. Comments included:

- Requests for clearer explanations of terminology and concepts used in the Plan
- Desire for clearer descriptions of different types of public spaces and how they function
- Feedback that improving clarity would help readers better understand opportunities, priorities and next steps

- Participants emphasised that clearer language and visuals would improve accessibility of the document and support broader community understanding.

Place-specific priorities and opportunities

Across all engagement methods, participants provided detailed, place-specific feedback.

This included:

- Identification of underutilised streets, laneways, station forecourts and residual spaces
- Suggestions for transforming car-dominated areas into places for people
- Ideas for improving connections between public spaces and nearby destinations
- Feedback on specific activity centres, including Glenroy, Brunswick, Coburg, Sydney Road and Lygon Street

Engagement method snapshots

Different engagement methods contributed distinct insights:

- Online surveys captured broad feedback and detailed written responses.
- Written and email submissions provided in-depth, place-specific commentary and formal input from organisations.
- In-person pop-ups captured practical, lived experience of public spaces.
- Community and advisory groups contributed perspectives on inclusion, accessibility and long-term planning.



7.4 CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES STRATEGY (2026-2029)

Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy

Early Years and Youth

Officer Recommendation

That Council adopts the Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026- 2029.

REPORT

Executive Summary

Children and families are at the heart of Merri-bek. Their voices, ideas and lived experiences help shape a vibrant, caring and connected community. By listening deeply and acting with purpose, Council, our partners and the wider community demonstrate that children and families are valued, celebrated and central to our city's future. The Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026–2029 (**Attachment 1**) sets out an inspiring shared vision for how agencies, governments, families, and the community will work together to create opportunities, strengthen wellbeing, and support every child and family to thrive in Merri-bek.

It identifies three key priority areas: Health and Wellbeing; Connection and Inclusion; Learning and Thriving. A series of strategic objectives are planned under each of these priority areas that will form the basis of a two-year Implementation Plan, incorporating detailed actions, time frames and resourcing requirements. The strategy informs Council's existing operations, as well as identified collaboration and partnering opportunities with external organisations and the community to deliver on the key strategies.

The strategy was developed through a process of research and data analysis along with a comprehensive stakeholder and community engagement process. Over 4,000 individual comments and pieces of feedback were collected from approximately 1,400 participants through a wide range of methods. A detailed Implementation Plan that outlines specific actions, timelines and responsibilities is being developed to support the delivery of the strategy.

Previous Council Decisions

Draft Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026- 2029 - April 2026

That Council endorses the draft Children Young People and Families Strategy 2026–2029 for public exhibition between 9 April 2026 – 27 April 2026.

1. Policy Context

The Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029 responds to the Merri-bek Community Vision for 2035: *Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind.*

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy aligns with a number of key strategic objectives of the Council Plan, in particular:

- Care for nature and climate resilience
- Healthy and inclusive communities
- Beautiful and liveable city

The strategy also seeks to support the health and wellbeing priorities which are incorporated into the Council Plan:

- Improving mental wellbeing and social connection
- Increasing active living
- Tackling climate change and its impacts on health
- Preventing all forms of violence and discrimination
- Improving food systems
- Reducing harm from tobacco and e-cigarette use
- Increasing immunisations

The strategy aligns with a range of International, Federal, State and local Merri-bek policies which focus on children and young people's rights and responsibilities, support early childhood development and frameworks for improving health and wellbeing and increasing the participation of children and young people in decision making. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Nest Model: six connected areas that cover the essential things children and young people need for the best start in life.

2. Background

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029 builds on the work of the previous four-year plan which was Merri-bek's first integrated plan for families and children from birth to adulthood. The priorities in this draft strategy have been developed in response to the feedback received from members of the Merri-bek community, including children, young people, parents and families and service providers who participated in a wider range of engagement activities between August and October 2025.

There is a strong and well-established evidence base about the conditions, environments and interventions that create positive outcomes for children and young people. Research consistently shows that when children do not experience optimal conditions early in life, targeted supports and timely interventions can significantly shift developmental pathways and improve long-term wellbeing. The following key findings have informed the development of the strategy:

- Children and young people's outcomes are shaped by the dynamic interaction of risk and protective factors, with cumulative advantage or disadvantage building over time.
- Collaboration across service providers leads to better outcomes, as coordinated, multidisciplinary efforts are more effective than isolated interventions when responding to the complex needs of families.
- Co-located and integrated service models provide substantial benefits, improving access, reducing service fragmentation, strengthening referral pathways and creating more holistic, family-centred support.
- Risk and protective factors interact in powerful ways, where risk factors can negatively affect development, while protective factors act as buffers that strengthen resilience, support recovery and promote positive adjustment even in challenging circumstances.

The priorities in the strategy and their associated objectives have also been informed by key state, national and international policies, strategies and evidence-frameworks, and shaped to align with the Merri-bek Community Vision, Council Plan 2025-2029 and other key Merri-bek strategies.

3. Issues

Key challenges

The engagement process identified the following issues and challenges in Merri-bek:

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Access to services, mental health, support for parents/carers, housing affordability, substance use, and safety were major concerns.
- **Places and Spaces:** Cleanliness, safety, inclusive infrastructure, and availability of parks and playgrounds were recurring issues.
- **Traffic and Transportation:** Road safety, congestion, accessibility, and cycling infrastructure were highlighted as areas needing improvement.
- **Inclusion and Connection:** Barriers for migrant and refugee families, discrimination, bullying, and support for women/girls were identified.
- **Financial Hardship:** Cost of living, programs and services costs impacted families' ability to access services and participate in community life – leading to issues of isolation, and deprivation.
- **Education, Employment and Youth Services:** Access to services, employment pathways, school engagement, and resources were areas of concern.

Community impact

The aspirations of the strategy will deliver multiple benefits for children, young people and families, improving access to facilities, services and supporting health, development, learning and wellbeing outcomes.

An Implementation Plan will be developed with a series of actions related to the strategic objectives. These actions will include Council's role, timeframe for completion and resourcing requirements. Coordination, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the strategy is an important part of understanding its impact and enables Council to identify further opportunities or actions required in the coming years.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026–2029 presents an opportunity to further raise the awareness of children and young people about environmental sustainability and the implications of climate change. Merri-bek's young people and families have been active in raising the issue of climate change and its impact on the environment and the community.

Economic sustainability implications

The strategy has as one of its key aspirations to improve learning opportunities and educational outcomes and key life stage transitions for Merri-bek's children and young people, which will have long term benefits in terms of young people's capability to transition from education to employment and contribute to the City's economic prosperity. Improved mental health screening and supports for new parents has the dual benefit of increased economic participation for women and is correlated with improved overall outcomes for children.

Human rights consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and aligns with Council's Human Rights Policy.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which forms part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, sets out children's right to: Education; health care; economic opportunity; protection from abuse and neglect; protection from sexual exploitation; and protection from economic exploitation.

Council also recognises the distinct developmental, relational and emotional needs of infants, the right to a responsive caregiver and early developmentally appropriate interventions.

Gender impact assessment

In line with the *Victorian Gender Equality Act (2021)* a Gender Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to how this strategy may have different impacts or lead to different outcomes for people of different genders. The focus on this assessment process was in relation to the engagement process undertaken to inform the development of the strategy – ensuring that diverse groups and voices were captured.

The strategy and its key actions will not result in negative consequences for any group or individual. The application of a gender lens is crucial in the development of the Implementation Plan to ensure individual actions contribute, where appropriate to Council's wider aspiration of creating gender equity in the Merri-bek community.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Between August and October 2025 Council conducted almost 50 engagement activities which reached a broad cross-section of the Merri-bek community. Over 4,000 individual comments and pieces of feedback were collected from approximately 1,400 participants through a wide range of methods including “pop-up” consultations at various locations and events, workshops and briefings, surveys and e-newsletters; social media, arts activities, focus groups and briefings. A draft strategy was released for public exhibition between 9 April 2026 – 27 April 2026 following endorsement at the April Council meeting. Feedback received was positive and affirmed the strategies aspirations and key priorities.

Affected persons rights and interests

The interests of children, young people and families are the primary focus of the strategy. The engagement process utilised a variety of methods including art activities enabling very young children to express their aspirations and a number of “pop up” consultations at community events and outreach activities occurred to ensure we reached members of Merri-bek's diverse community.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

Implementation of the strategy will require resourcing and a change in focus for some operational areas within Council. Re-alignment of program operations may result in savings and presents an opportunity for re-investment to ensure services address the current and future needs of community.

7. Implementation

A detailed Implementation Plan that outlines specific actions, timelines and responsibilities is being developed to support the delivery of the strategy over the coming years and achievements will be reported to Council on an annual basis.

Attachment/s

- [1](#) Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029 D26/186885



Children, Young People & Families Strategy 2026-2029



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Mayor's Foreword

We are proud to present the Merri-bek Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026–2029, a strategy shaped by the voices, experiences and aspirations of our community. More than 1,400 children, young people, parents, carers, community members and service providers contributed to this work, and we sincerely thank everyone who shared their insights, ideas and hopes for our future. Your contributions have directly informed these strategic priorities and will continue to guide our actions over the years ahead.

This Strategy marks an important step forward in how Council continues critical work to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. By setting clear priorities, supported by a two-year Implementation Plan – we will take practical actions to deliver meaningful change. This approach ensures we stay accountable, responsive and firmly grounded in what our community tells us matters most.

The priorities within the Strategy align with the Council Plan 2025–2029 and build on the community vision that Merri-bek leads and leaves no one behind. By strengthening partnerships, improving access to services, investing in learning and wellbeing, and supporting safe, inclusive and connected communities, this Strategy adds value across multiple areas of Council's work.

We know that improving outcomes for children and young people requires effort from our entire community. Council does not do this work alone - ongoing collaboration with families, the education and health sectors, community organisations, and local services remains essential. As we deliver and refine our actions, we will continue to listen, learn and seek opportunities to partner, innovate and adapt.

Thank you again to everyone who contributed to this Strategy. Together, we are building a Merri-bek where children, young people and families feel valued, supported and able to thrive.

Executive Summary

Vision: Merri-bek is a place where all children, young people and families feel safe, and valued and have the opportunities and support they need to learn, thrive and be healthy.		
Strategic Priorities		
Health and wellbeing	Connection and inclusion	Learning and thriving
Strategic Objectives		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play and physical activity 2. Being safe and feeling cared for 3. Access to health services and supports 4. Basic needs met 5. A clean and healthy environment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inclusive and connected communities 2. Meaningful participation and influence 3. Inclusive spaces, services and activities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early childhood development and learning 2. Developing skills for life 3. Support through life stage transitions
<p>Principles of how we'll deliver this strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships and collaboration • Equity and inclusion • Infant, child and youth centered • Family focused • Cultural safety 		

Introduction

The **Merri-bek Children, Young People and Families Strategy 2026-2029** builds on the previous Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025, which was Council's first integrated plan to support local children and young people from birth to adulthood. This Strategy aims to ensure Merri-bek is a place where every child and young person has the best possible start in life.

Our vision

Merri-bek is a place where all children, young people and families feel safe, and valued and have the opportunities and support they need to learn, thrive and be healthy.

Strategic Priorities

The priorities in this Strategy have been developed in response to the feedback we received from over 1400 members of the Merri-bek community who participated in community engagement activities from August to October 2025.

The priorities have also been informed by key state, national and international policies, strategies and evidence-frameworks, and have been shaped to align with the Merri-bek Community Vision, Council Plan 2025-2029 and other key Merri-bek strategies.

The Strategy has three key themes, reflecting what is most important for children, young people and families in Merri-bek:

- Health and wellbeing
- Connection and inclusion
- Learning and thriving

Guiding Principles

Our Guiding Principles outline the essential considerations that must underpin all Action Areas of the Strategy, including how Council and partners will work together—listening, learning, sharing and holding each other accountable as we strive to deliver better outcomes for all children, young people and families.

Partnerships and collaboration

Children, young people and families have complex and changing needs that cannot be addressed by any single organisation working in isolation. Strong, flexible and responsive partnerships are essential to achieving better outcomes. This Strategy is intended to guide Council and our partners as we work together to develop collaborative responses to the strategic priorities and objectives. It reflects a snapshot in time of the issues and priorities identified by the community and stakeholders as most important. We acknowledge that these priorities will evolve and that our collective responses must adapt accordingly.

We are committed to working collaboratively through both formal and informal partnerships that leverage strengths, share expertise and build capacity across Council and the wider systems that support children, young people and families, including education, health and community services. Central to this commitment is working directly with children, young people and families to understand their experiences, respond to their needs and build on the strengths they bring.

Equity and inclusion

We are committed to taking action to address social and economic disadvantage, exclusion and discrimination, and to working to support all children, young people and families to thrive. We are also committed to providing all children, young people and their families with accessible and inclusive services and support.

We recognise that achieving equitable outcomes for all children, young people and families starts at birth and requires us to focus on understanding and, when necessary, prioritising people who may be at greater risk of disadvantage and discrimination. In alignment with Council's Human Rights Policy 2016-2026 we are committed to responding to the needs of children, young people and families from the following groups:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People with Disability
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual-plus, Transgender and gender diverse, Queer or Questioning, Asexual and Aromantic, and Intersex people (LGBTIQ+)
- Migrant, Refugee and Faith Communities
- Women, Girls and Gender Diverse Communities
- People experiencing poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage
- Other priority groups who may be identified in the future

Infant, child and youth centred

The needs and rights of infants, children and young people guide this strategy. Like adults, children and infants have civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Additional rights enshrined for all children in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child include the right to protection from abuse and the right to be cared for.

We recognise that infants and young children are dependent on the availability of consistent and responsive care from specific adults for the adequate development of their basic human capacities. We are committed to listening and responding to children and young people and to resourcing and empowering them to shape decisions on the issues that impact them.

Family focused

We recognise that families and supportive relationships provide the foundations that enable children and young people to thrive. Families provide children with the opportunities and experiences that shape their learning, development and wellbeing. To ensure that children and young people thrive, their parents, carers and families also need to be supported in their own wellbeing.

We are committed to working collaboratively with families to understand and respond to their needs and to support them to create the conditions in which their children can learn, develop, be healthy and thrive.

We understand that infants' development depends on consistent, responsive care from specific adults and that the formation of new families is one of the most significant transitions people experience. We are committed to providing culturally appropriate support to parents and carers from pregnancy through the early years, and to actively supporting the development of strong social networks among families in our community.

We recognise that all parents and carers benefit from support when caring for and raising children, including fathers, non-birthing parents, same sex couples, grandparent carers and kinship carers, and believe that services and programs should be designed to actively include and welcome all who care for children.

Cultural safety

We are committed to creating culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families across all services and settings.

A strong sense of identity and culture is essential for wellbeing, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. Cultural safety goes beyond awareness—it requires positive recognition, celebration of culture, and an environment where people can express their identity without fear of racism or discrimination. This is an important consideration in the way Council engages with and delivers services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

We are committed to working in genuine partnership with Wurundjeri and local Aboriginal community controlled services to ensure our services and supports are culturally safe and self-determination focused.

Prioritisation, resourcing and advocacy

Council recognises that the needs and aspirations of children, young people and families exceed the resources available to local government, and that services, programs and supporting infrastructure cannot all be delivered or expanded at the same time. Transparent and consistent principles will be applied in prioritising, resourcing and advocating for action in regard to key priorities. Prioritisation decisions will be guided by a combination of factors, including:

- current and projected demand across different life stages
- areas of greatest service gap, vulnerability or disadvantage, and evidence of unmet need from service data and community engagement
- the effectiveness, accessibility and sustainability of existing service models and supporting infrastructure
- opportunities to improve outcomes through integration, co-location or shared use
- availability of workforce capacity, land, funding and delivery partnerships

Council will manage expectations by aligning service planning, infrastructure planning, engagement and decision-making with adopted strategies and implementation plans, and by clearly communicating the sequencing and staging of investment over time.

Where identified needs cannot be addressed through Council services, programs or infrastructure alone, advocacy to other levels of government and system partners will be a key mechanism for responding. Council will use evidence from service delivery, community engagement and planning to advocate for funding, access to services, workforce capacity, policy change and system reform that support improved outcomes for children, young people and families in Merri-bek.

Key frameworks

This Strategy will be guided by a holistic and evidence-based approach to children and young people's wellbeing and development. In developing this strategy, we have drawn on several key frameworks that help us to understand and respond to children and young people's needs comprehensively and holistically. Our key frameworks and reference points include:

The Nest Wellbeing Framework

Developed by leading Australian academics through the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), the Nest Model, outlines six connected areas that cover the essentials that children and young people need for the best start in life:

- **Valued Loved & Safe.** Ensuring children feel valued in loving and secure environments.
- **Healthy.** Promoting good physical and mental health.
- **Identity & Culture.** Supporting a strong sense of self and belonging, including cultural identity and values.
- **Material Basics.** Providing access to essential material needs like food, housing, transport and other essentials.
- **Participating.** Engaging children and young people in decision-making processes that affect them.
- **Learning.** Encouraging effective learning and development opportunities from early childhood through to adult life.

The First 1000 Days

The period from conception to a child's second birthday, known as the first 1000 days, is firmly established in national and international health policy as the most critical window for human development. During this period, brain architecture is established at a pace never repeated in later life, the foundations of physical and mental health are laid, and the caregiving relationships that shape a child's social and emotional development are formed.

This framework underpins Council's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service and informs how we approach immunisation, infant nutrition, perinatal mental health and new family support.

Infant Mental Health

Infant mental health refers to the social and emotional development of children from birth to three years of age. It is not a clinical concept but a developmental one: the capacity of very young children to experience, regulate and express emotions is shaped above all by the quality and consistency of their caregiving relationships.

When parents and carers are emotionally, practically and socially supported, infants develop secure attachment, healthy stress regulation and the foundations for lifelong learning and resilience. Conversely, when caregiving relationships are disrupted by perinatal depression or anxiety, family violence, trauma, poverty or isolation, the effects on infant development can be profound and lasting.

This framework informs Council's approach to perinatal mental health, family support, new parent group programming, and our partnerships with specialist services. It also reinforces why supporting parents is not separate from supporting children – it is the same work.

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) framework

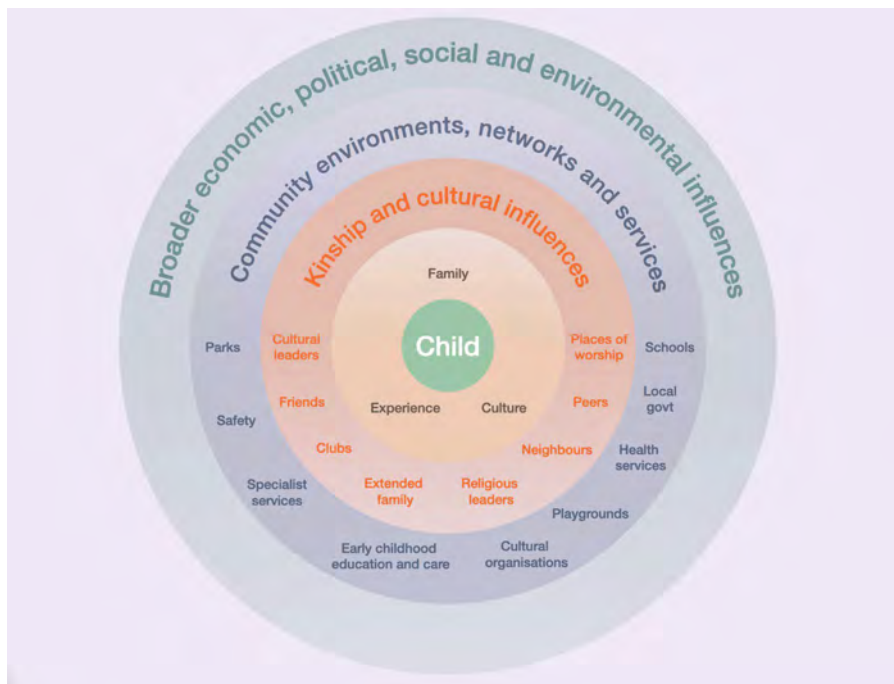
The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service is a free, universal primary health service available to all Victorian families with children from birth to school age which aims to promote and optimise health, wellbeing, safety, development and learning outcomes for all children and their families.

The MCH Framework is underpinned by 10 guiding principles. The first and central principle is: **Child, maternal and family-centred practice**. This principle places the needs and experiences of the child, mother and family at the core of all service delivery. The other nine principles support this principle and promote holistic, responsive and accountable care:

- Universal access
- Victorian Aboriginal communities' cultural safety
- Equitable and inclusive
- Diversity responsiveness
- Health promotion, prevention and early intervention
- Collaboration and partnerships
- Quality and safety
- Evidence informed
- Reflective practice and continuous improvement

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)

The VEYLDF outlines a comprehensive approach to children's learning and development from birth to eight years of age, which recognises the crucial connections between wellbeing and learning. The framework is underpinned by an ecological model that acknowledges the influence of family, community, culture, experience and broader economic, political, social and environmental factors on children's wellbeing, learning and development.



Source: Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (Ecological Model adapted from Bronfenbrenner 1979)

Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Councils approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families is informed by the Social and Emotional (SEWB) framework, which understands wellbeing as holistic and inseparable from connection to Country, culture, family, kinship and community.

The SEWB Framework, developed through the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities and embedded in national Aboriginal health policy, provides a holistic understanding of wellbeing that recognises the individual as embedded in relationships and community — not as an isolated unit.

For children and families, this means that concepts such as attachment, caregiving, family formation and community belonging must be understood within extended kinship structures and cultural frameworks. It also means that culturally safe services are designed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal community organisations and grounded in self-determination.

Council's approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families is also informed by the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC outlines the universal civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that every child is entitled to and explains how adults and governments should act to ensure all children can enjoy all of their rights.

The 54 articles of the UNCRC cover all aspects of a child's rights. The rights enshrined in the UNCRC include the rights of every child to:

- Relax and play
- Freedom of expression
- Be safe from violence
- An education
- Protection of identity
- Sufficient standard of living
- Know their rights
- Health and health services.

Merri-bek City Council context

The Children, Young People and Families Strategy aligns with the aims and priorities of the Merri-bek Council Plan and other key strategies and plans.

The **Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029** responds to the Merri-bek Community Vision for 2035: *Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind.*

The Council Plan outlines five key strategic directions for Merri-bek over the next 4 years:

- Care for nature and climate resilience
- Healthy and inclusive communities
- Beautiful and liveable city
- Thriving economy and culture
- Engaging and responsible Council

The Council Plan also integrates five health and wellbeing priorities and two additional focus areas within the directions and initiatives of the plan:

- Improving mental wellbeing and social connection
- Increasing active living
- Tackling climate change and its impacts on health
- Preventing all forms of violence and discrimination
- Improving food systems
- Other areas
 - Reducing harm from tobacco and e-cigarette use
 - Increasing immunisations

The **Merri-bek Human Rights Policy 2016-2026** (revised in 2022) outlines Council's commitment to specific priority groups which are recognised as being at greatest risk of exclusion from social, economic and political life because of access barriers and discrimination:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People with Disability
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual-plus, Transgender and gender diverse, Queer or Questioning, Asexual and Aromantic, and Intersex people (LGBTIQ+)
- Migrant, Refugee and Faith Communities
- Women, Girls and Gender Diverse Communities.

In the 2022 refresh of the Human Rights Policy, Council identified the following additional priorities when considering human rights:

- An age and lifespan lens, with attention to children, young people and older people
- Poverty, inequality and socioeconomic status
- Climate change and climate justice
- Issues exacerbated by COVID-19
- Carers, volunteering and civic participation (unpaid caring/contributions).

Other key Council strategies and plans

A range of other Council strategies and plans outline commitments and priorities that support children, young people and families to thrive. Some of the key plans and strategies that support the priorities of this strategy include:

- Disability Action and Inclusion Plan 2022-2026
- Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2022-2030
- LGBTIQ+ Action Plan 2023-2026
- Library Strategy (new strategy due for endorsement in 2026)
- Nature Plan 2025-2029
- Open Space Strategy 2024-2034
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025
- Living and Ageing Well Implementation Plan 2025-2029
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020-2030

Council services and supports for Children, Young People and Families

Council works in multiple ways to support children, young people and families. This includes:

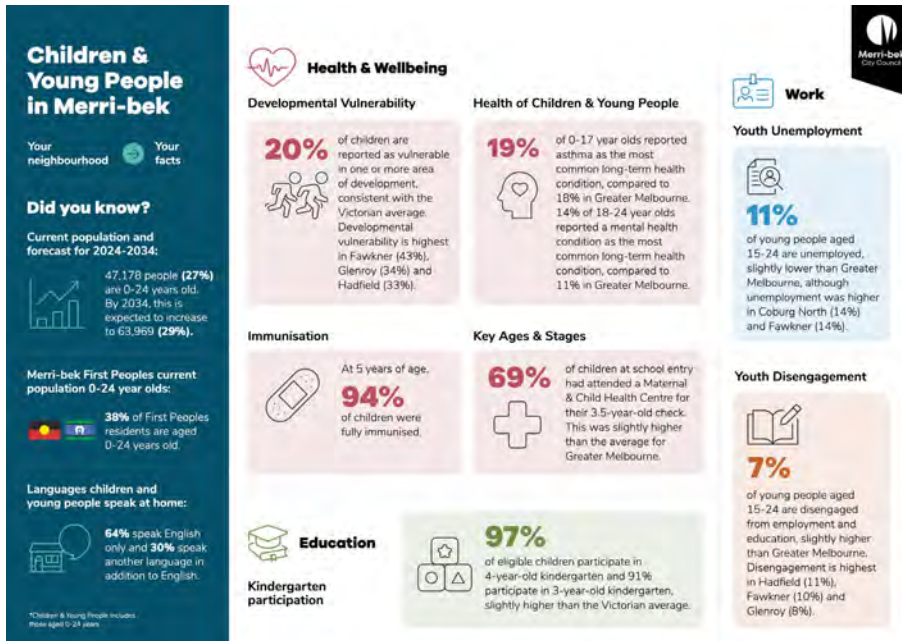
- Service delivery
- Planning and coordination of services and infrastructure
- Advocacy on behalf of children, young people and families to other levels of government and other key stakeholders
- Engaging with children, young people and families to build their capacity and facilitate their influence over the issues and decisions that impact them

Council's services accompany families on a journey from the earliest days of a child's life through to young adulthood. This journey is not a linear progression through discrete services, it is a series of relationships, touchpoints and transitions, each building on the last. The aim is that families experience Council's services as a connected system providing support across a child's life, with universal services and targeted supports working together.

- Council's first contact with a new family is through the **universal Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service**, commencing with home visit in the first two weeks of a child's life and including ten structured visits at key ages and stages from birth to 3.5 years. MCH nurses provide evidence-based anticipatory guidance, the right information at the right time, on infant feeding, sleep, development, play, and family wellbeing.
- For families with additional needs, the **Enhanced MCH service** provides more intensive, targeted support from birth to three years.
- Council's **Immunisation service** provides the National Immunisation Program schedule from birth, recording vaccinations on the Australian Immunisation Register and supporting families to maintain their child's immunisation status. Immunisation is a whole-of-life program, with the schedule continuing through childhood and adolescence and then across the life course for priority populations.
- **First Time Parent Groups**, facilitated by MCH nurses, provide structured peer support and connection for new parents from the earliest months of their child's life. These groups are both a health and development resource and a community-building mechanism.

- As children move through the toddler and early childhood years, Council supports families through **Supported Playgroups** and **Family Day Care** and facilitates access to early learning services through **Kindergarten and Early Years Service registration, resourcing and support for early years services**, and **early years infrastructure planning and delivery**.
- The **Kindergarten Outreach Program** provides targeted support for families who may face barriers to kindergarten participation, including CALD families, Aboriginal families, and families experiencing disadvantage.
- Council maintains connection through **library programs and activities, partnerships with primary schools**, and civic participation initiatives such as **Children's Reference Group activities** and **Principals' Forums**. These touchpoints support learning, community connection and the development of young people's voice and agency.
- Council's **Youth team** provides programs and services for young people aged 12–25, including the **Youth Ambassador Program** and targeted **youth activities**. Council's youth services connect young people to employment pathways, mental health supports, creative opportunities and civic engagement.
- At every stage of this journey, Council works in partnership with the broader systems that support children and families as a core part of our approach to providing holistic and comprehensive support.

Demographic overview



How this Strategy was developed

This Strategy was informed by a community and stakeholder engagement process that engaged approximately 1,400 members of the Merri-bek community.

The engagement activities included:

- Surveys for different groups and ages, available online and in hard-copy
- Art activities for children aged 2-12
- 7 pop-ups at local community spaces and events around Merri-bek
- 3 workshops with multicultural families, and parents and carers of children living with disability
- 8 Focus Groups with community or stakeholder groups
- 4 briefing and feedback discussions with key stakeholder groups
- A workshop with Council staff from the Early Years and Youth Branch

The purpose of this engagement process was to:

- understand the key issues and challenges facing children, young people and families
- understand what is working well for children, young people and families and what Council could do better
- reach a diverse mix of local communities and provide opportunities for the broader community to provide feedback.

Demographic data collected during the engagement activities showed a strong representation of children and young people (70% aged under 18), a predominance of female participants (71%), and contributions from a wide range of suburbs, cultural backgrounds, and language groups. The engagement process included a focus on reaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, people with a disability, LGBTQIA+ communities, migrant and refugee families, and service providers.

Key findings from this process, which have been critical in shaping this strategy include:

Things Merri-bek is doing well

- **Places & Spaces:** Parks, playgrounds, sporting facilities, community hubs, schools and libraries are highly valued. Children and families appreciate the natural environment, recreational opportunities, and inclusive community events.
- **Inclusion & Connection:** Merri-bek's strong sense of community, social cohesion, and celebration of diversity are seen as strengths.
- **Health & Wellbeing:** Maternal Child Health services, sports programmes, and mental health support are appreciated.
- **Learning & Participation:** Early years services, playgroups, youth education, and community engagement initiatives are seen as strengths.

Issues and Challenges in Merri-bek

- Health & Wellbeing: Access to services, mental health issues, support for parents/carers, housing affordability and substance use are concerns.
- Places & Spaces: Cleanliness, safety, inclusive infrastructure, and availability of parks and playgrounds are important issues for the community.
- Traffic & Transportation: Road safety, congestion, accessibility, and cycling infrastructure are seen as needing improvement.
- Inclusion & Connection: Barriers to support and services for migrant and refugee families, discrimination, bullying, and support for women/girls were identified as issues.
- Financial Hardship: Cost of living and programs and services costs can be barriers to accessing services and participating in community life.
- Education, Employment & Youth Services: Access to services, employment pathways, school engagement, and resources are areas of concern.

Strategic priorities

Priority 1: Health and wellbeing

We will support children, young people and families to have good physical and mental health, to feel safe and secure in their homes and communities, to have their essential materials needs met, and to have access to the services and supports they need to maintain their wellbeing.

Strategic Objectives

1. **Play and physical activity:** Support children and young people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and genders to enjoy a wide range of opportunities to play and be active, and to access to community infrastructure that meets their needs.
2. **Being safe and feeling cared for:** Support children and young people to feel safe and cared for within their families and communities.
3. **Access to health services and supports:** Support children, young people and families to have access to affordable services and supports for their physical and mental health.
4. **Basic needs met:** Support children, young people and families to have access to secure, stable housing, nutritious food, essential services and other basic needs.
5. **A clean and healthy environment:** Support work to create cleaner and greener environments for children, young people and families to enjoy, and take action on climate change.

Community priorities this responds to

- Affordable and accessible health services including mental health services
- Affordable and accessible sports and recreation infrastructure and opportunities for all ages, abilities and genders
- Supporting women and girls' access to sports opportunities
- Safe, clean and accessible parks, playgrounds and open spaces, with facilities and infrastructure that is accessible and inclusive of varied ages and abilities
- Opportunities to be active outside – walking, riding and skating
- Safe roads, pedestrian safety, school crossings, cycling infrastructure
- Mental health needs of parents and families in a context of financial stress, isolation, and work/life balance challenges
- Cost of living, housing affordability, homelessness supports, food security, cost of services

Council strategies and plans this aligns with

- Council Plan 2025-2029 outcomes
 - Healthy and inclusive communities
 - Beautiful and liveable city
 - Health and wellbeing priorities
- Human Rights Policy 2016-2026
- Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2022-2030
- Open Space Strategy 2024-2034
- Nature Plan 2025-2029
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020-2030

State, national and international frameworks and policy directions this aligns with

- The Nest domains: Healthy; Material Basics; Valued, Loved & Safe
- Early Years Learning Outcomes: strong sense of wellbeing
- Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures: Victoria's five-year action plan to support children and young people to be healthy, active and well

- Victorian Child Safe Standards
- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM)
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Wellbeing in Victoria: Strategy to Promote Good Mental Health 2025–2035
- National Perinatal Mental Health Guideline
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: including children's rights to play and join a range of leisure activities, to be safe from violence, to have a sufficient standard of living, to have access to health care
- Victorian Maternal and Child Health Program Guidelines
- National Immunisation Strategy for Australia (2025-2030)
- Victorian Early Years Compact

Priority 2: Connection and inclusion

We will support children, young people and families to feel connected, included and supported, to participate in their communities, and to have a say over the decisions and issues that impact their lives.

Strategic Objectives

1. **Inclusive and connected communities:** Support children, young people and families to connect with each other and with the broader community through inclusive and accessible community activities that build connection and inclusion.
2. **Meaningful participation and influence:** Provide children, young people and families with opportunities for meaningful participation and influence over decisions and issues which impact them.
3. **Inclusive spaces, services and activities:** Support children, young people and families to access welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe public spaces, services and activities.

Community priorities this responds to

- More inclusive and accessible community infrastructure.
- Addressing discrimination and racism - becoming a more tolerant, diverse and cohesive community
- Building a sense of community and belonging through opportunities to bring people together to celebrate and support each other
- Inclusive, culturally safe, and accessible programs and events, including for migrant, refugee, First Nations and LGBTQIA+ communities, women and girls, and people with disability
- Supports for parents and carers
- More activities, programs and events to support children, young people and families to participate and connect
- Ongoing and deep engagement by Council with the community
- More comprehensive and inclusive information sharing and promotion of Council services
- Addressing additional and specific barriers that migrant families face accessing services or connecting with community
- More youth-specific spaces

Council strategies and plans this aligns with

- Council Plan 2025-2029 outcomes
 - Healthy and inclusive communities
 - Thriving economy and culture
 - Engaging and responsible Council
- Human Rights Policy 2016-2026
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025
- Living and Ageing Well Implementation Plan 2025-2029
- LGBTQIA+ Action Plan 2023-2026
- Disability Action and Inclusion Plan 2022-2026

State, national and international frameworks and policy directions this aligns with

- The Nest domains: Identity & Culture; Participating
- Early Years Learning Outcomes: strong sense of identity; connected with and contribute to their world
- Victorian Youth Strategy
- Victorian Child Safe Standards
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: including children's rights to meet with other children and join groups, and to have a say over decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account.
- Victorian Maternal and Child Health Program Guidelines
- National Immunisation Strategy for Australia (2025-2030)
- Victorian Early Years Compact

Priority 3: Learning and thriving

We will support children, young people and families to develop the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to thrive throughout their lives.

Strategic Objectives

1. **Early childhood development and learning:** Support children and young people's learning and development from early childhood through to young adulthood.
2. **Developing skills for life:** Support children and young people to develop the skills and capabilities they need to thrive throughout their lives.
3. **Support through life stage transitions:** Support children, young people and families through their major life stage transitions, including transitions through the education system, entering the workforce, and becoming parents.

Community priorities this priority responds to

- Affordable and accessible early childhood services (kindergarten, early learning centres and playgroups)
- School engagement/engaging with learning
- School and family partnerships
- Better support for those struggling with school transitions
- Equipping young people to succeed through mentoring and life skills development
- Employment opportunities and pathways into local employment
- Inclusive lifelong learning including for parenting skill development

Council strategies and plans this priority aligns with:

- Council Plan 2025-2029 outcomes
 - Thriving economy and culture
- Human Rights Policy 2016-2026
- Libraries Strategy

State, national and international frameworks and policy directions this priority aligns with and responds to:

- The Nest domains: Learning
- Early Years Learning Outcomes: confidence and involved learners
- Victorian Best Start, Best Life reforms
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework revision and Early Years Learning Framework 2.0
- Victorian Youth Strategy
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- NDIS reforms and introduction of the Thriving Kids Program
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: including children's right to an education.

Delivery, monitoring and evaluation of this strategy

Implementation Plans

This Strategy outlines Council's priorities for improving outcomes for children, young people and families over the next four years. Delivery of this Strategy will be led through the development of Implementation Plans, beginning with an initial two-year Implementation Plan for 2026-2027.

The Implementation Plan will outline the actions that Council will take to progress the strategic objectives across each of the priorities in this Strategy. The Implementation Plan will be developed through a cross-Council process to identify actions that will be led by Departments across Council. It will include a range of actions that Council will take to deliver the strategic objectives, including actions related to service delivery, partnerships, community engagement and advocacy priorities.

Monitoring and Reporting

Council will review the progress of the Children Young People and Families Strategy annually.

The Implementation plan will also be reviewed and refreshed annually, and a report will be provided to Council outlining progress in implementing the key actions.

Appendix: Key references

Council's plans, strategies and policies

- Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029
- Merri-bek Human Rights Policy 2016-2026 (revised 2022)
- Disability Action & Inclusion Plan 2022-2026
- Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2022-2030
- LGBTIQ+ Action Plan 2023-2026
- Library Strategy (new strategy due for endorsement in 2026)
- Nature Plan 2025-2029
- Open Space Strategy 2024-2034
- Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020-2030

State and Federal policy, strategy and frameworks

- Best Start, Best Life (BSBL) reforms, Victorian Government
- Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Department of Education, Australian Government (2022)
- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM), Family Safe Victoria (2018)
- Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures: Victoria's five-year action plan to support children and young people to be healthy, active and well, Victorian Government (2021)
- Maternal and Child Health Service guidelines, Department of Health, Victoria (2021)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy, National Indigenous Australians Agency (2021)
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government (2020)
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, National Mental Health Commission (2021)
- National Immunisation Strategy for Australia 2025-2030, Australian Centre for Disease Control (2025)
- National Perinatal Mental Health Guideline, COPE: Centre for Perinatal Excellence (2023)
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-23, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government (2017)
- Our promise, Your future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Victoria (2022)
- The Nest Wellbeing Framework, ARACY: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, (2013)
- Victorian Child Safe Standards, Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), Department of Education and Training, Victoria (2016)
- Wellbeing in Victoria: A Strategy to Promote Good Mental Health 2025-2035, Department of Health, Victoria (2025)

International agreements and frameworks

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

7.5 LIBRARY SERVICES STRATEGY

Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy

Cultural Development

Officer Recommendation

That Council adopts the Library Services Strategy 2026-2031.

REPORT

Executive Summary

Extensive community consultation, staff engagement, benchmarking and research was undertaken to inform the development of the Library Services Strategy 2026-2031.

The strategy has four overarching aims that align with community expectations and will form the basis of annual operational plans for the library service from July 2026:

- Welcoming places: Merri-bek Libraries are welcoming, flexible and inclusive places for everyone in the community.
- Inspiring collections: Our collections inform, inspire and entertain, evolving to meet the changing needs and interests of the community.
- Community connections: Programs and services provide more opportunities to create, celebrate, learn and connect at the library.
- Contemporary library service: Library staff reflect our diverse community, and are trained to provide an excellent, tailored service to the Merri-bek community.

At the March Meeting, Council approved the draft Library Services Strategy for exhibition with some adjusted wording. The draft Library Services Strategy was subsequently updated and released for public exhibition from 20 April – 10 May 2026. Eight submissions were received.

A final version of the Library Services Strategy is at **Attachment 1** to this report.

Previous Council Decisions

Draft Library Services Strategy 2026-2031 – 11 March 2026

That Council endorses the draft Library Services Strategy 2026-2031 for public exhibition in March and April 2026 with wording in the document to indicate that Merri-bek libraries do not intend to adopt the model of unstaffed library hours. In addition that under the heading “Contemporary Library services”, one of the actions to read “Opening hours reflect community expectations, including for staffed library opening hours”.

Library Services Strategy 2019 – 13 March 2019

That Council adopts the Library Services Strategy 2019, at Attachment 1 to this report.

1. Policy Context

Merri-bek Community Vision 2024–2028

Merri-bek leads and leaves no one behind.

Merri-bek Council Plan 2024–2028

- 2.3 - Offer a range of services for all ages and stages to support children and families, encourage participation in programs that strengthen community ties, and highlight the importance of early childhood education and health.

- 2.8 - Focus on our core services that are accessible and affordable to everyone, with special attention to mental health, lifelong education and learning services.
- 4.9 - Enhance Merri-bek's cultural landscape by supporting the production and delivery of arts programs, events, and library facilities, providing opportunities to create, learn, and connect.

2. Background

The Library Services Strategy 2026-2031 will replace the Library Services Strategy 2019. Extensive community and staff consultation, research and benchmarking has been undertaken in preparation of the strategy.

Following approval at the March Council Meeting, the draft Library Services Strategy was released for public exhibition from 20 April until 10 May 2026.

The final version of the Library Services Strategy includes changes requested by the Council resolution in March 2026 about staffed library opening hours, and some amendments following feedback during the public exhibition.

The submissions received included suggestions of minor changes to wording and language, as well as positive feedback about the strategy.

Changes made to the draft strategy following consultation were:

- Suggestions regarding built spaces, which will be considered during planned building works.
- Suggestion to include a community-led outreach model and consider communication with non-English speaking community members, which will be addressed in action planning.

3. Issues

Community impact

Merri-bek Libraries provide services to a proudly diverse community, with 44,908 library members. Speakers of languages other than English exceed the metropolitan average, especially in the north of the city. Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index shows high levels of disadvantage in the city, particularly in the north. Australian Early Development Census (AECDC) data shows improvement in school readiness, but there is still work to do here. Merri-bek has a higher than average number of lone person households and renters.

An average of 49 people visit a Merri-bek Library each hour that they are open.

Merri-bek Libraries are in the top ten libraries in the state for:

- Staffed opening hours per branch
- Active borrowers
- Total number of collection items

Library Services Strategy 2026-2031

In addition to industry benchmarking, the Library Services Strategy 2026-2031 responds directly to community and staff engagement undertaken across the past year. It outlines a number of strategic goals.

What we heard...	What we will deliver
Libraries need flexible physical spaces to support a range of different uses.	New Coburg Library and Piazza. Program of library refurbishment to increase amenity, access to study space and support programming at Brunswick, Campbell-Turnbull and Fawkner Libraries.

What we heard...	What we will deliver
Physical collections are very important. Strong support for borrowing non-book items (Library of Things). Demand for digital collections continues to grow.	An exciting Library of Things. News about all the great library collections and how to best use them. Inspiring digital and physical collections. Increased digital help opportunities at the library.
Library programs are popular and necessary.	An annual large-scale celebration to bring the community together. Programs that support social cohesion, social connection and build a sense of community belonging. Range of programs designed specifically for and with our priority cohorts; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders - Migrant, refugee, and faith communities - People with disability - Women, girls, and gender diverse - LGBTIQ+ communities
Strong support for libraries to be open more on evenings and weekends. Library staff are valued. Library Social Worker Program is valued.	Opening hours reflect community expectations, including for staffed library opening hours. The best possible service and support provided by skilled library staff. An enhanced Library Social Work Program to support vulnerable community members.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Library collections include relevant print material and have been enhanced through partnership with the sustainability team to introduce environment positive collection items such as portable induction cooktops for loan. Library redevelopments will include best practice and innovative environmentally sustainable design initiatives to ensure these spaces are more resilient to the impacts of climate change and more comfortable for occupants.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

- A Gender Equity Impact Assessment was completed in April 2025.
- Library staff engagement took place between 12 May – 15 June 2025 and included digital engagement through Conversations Merri-bek, in-person workshops, and a presentation at the staff training day.
- Community engagement took place between 1 July – 12 August 2025, including digital engagement through Conversations Merri-bek, pop-ups at community locations, focus group sessions with cohorts not usually reached, and activities at the libraries.
- There were over 520 responses to the survey online and at in-person events.

- The Library Services Strategy was on Public Exhibition between 20 April – 10 May 2026.
 - Eight responses were received during exhibition of the draft Library Services Strategy.
 - Community languages translations of the Library Services Strategy were accessed 75 times.
 - A plain English version of the strategy was accessed 23 times.

The use of the translations and plain English format demonstrates the strong interest in libraries by our diverse community.

Recent library community engagement that has informed this strategy includes consultation with Merri-bek's Human Rights priority groups to ensure that diverse voices are heard in the development library strategies and policies. These groups include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Migrant, Refugee and Faith Communities
- People with Disability
- Women, Girls and Gender Diverse Communities
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Gender Diverse, Intersex, Queer and Asexual and Aromantic (LGBTIQ+) communities

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

Affected persons include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, migrant, refugee, and faith communities, people with a disability, women, girls, and gender diverse people, and LGBTIQ+ communities, and general community members including young people and the aged, who were consulted extensively on the creation of this strategy.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

In developing this Strategy serious consideration has been given to leveraging opportunities for collaboration and efficiencies and will largely be funded by shifting existing resources to areas of identified need.

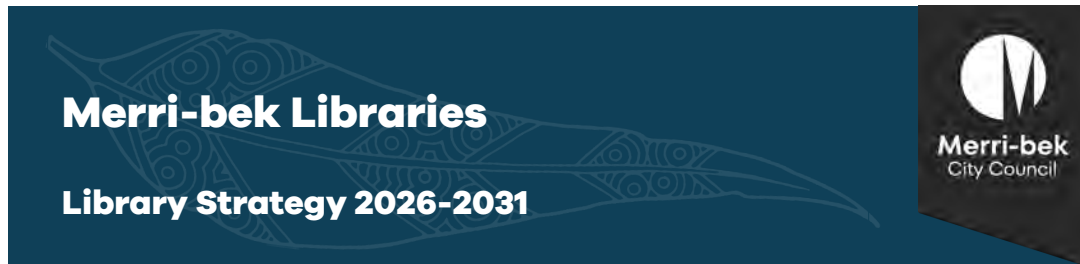
Library redevelopments will be funded through the Capital Works budget.

7. Implementation

Once adopted, the Library Services Strategy will be operationalised through annual plans.

Attachment/s

- 1 [Library Services - Library Strategy 2026-2031 - Final following Public Exhibition](#) D26/219018



Mayor's Foreward.....

Introduction

This strategy will;

- describe the environment in which Merri-bek Libraries is operating, locally and at a broader level
- outline the community we serve
- celebrate achievements of the Library Strategy 2019
- define how we have engaged with the community
- reflect what we have heard from the community
- commit to acting on what we have heard from the community
- set a direction that ensures the Merri-bek community has a contemporary library service offering sustainable services and programs in welcoming spaces

Victorian Public Libraries

Victorian Public Libraries are constantly evolving. Providing access to information, shared resources and shared spaces, public libraries are one of very few locations where you can access free loans, services and space. Whether you're seeking answers to a specific question, a place to learn, or simply somewhere to spend time without financial pressure, your local library is here for you.

Across Victoria, public libraries are navigating reduced state government funding at the same time community demand for services, collections, and programs continues to grow. During a cost-of-living crisis, free services, such as the local library can help make ends meet.

As a library user, you are in good company - almost 1/3 of all Victorians are library members and many non-members visit libraries and use their services and programs.

A rise in loneliness has emphasised the role of the library as a facilitator of community connection. There is more social programming in libraries such as Conversation and Craft Clubs, late night opening hours and partnerships such as Chatty Café, increasing opportunities for connection in the library.

Increased anti-social behaviour has impacted public libraries, creating a challenge to ensure that these loved spaces remain safe for community and staff. Libraries are implementing interventions including security guards, abolishing fines and increasing opportunities for building connections with others to address this social change.

As lives get busier, there is increased demand for longer library opening hours, libraries across the state are meeting this demand through increased operating hours, digital collections available 24/7, new libraries, lockers for item collection outside of operating hours and unstaffed access to make accessing the library more convenient.

With government services moving towards a digital-first delivery model and the rise of AI, libraries are experiencing increased demand for digital help, which they are addressing with digital literacy programming, delivered by library staff and in partnership with specialist organisations and referral to community support organisations.

Early Literacy continues to be a focus for public libraries, even after the introduction of free 3 year old kinder, programs such as Rhyme Time and Storytime continue to be in high demand, providing early literacy education for our youngest community members and support for parents and carers as their child's first teacher.

The Merri-bek Community

Merri-bek Libraries provides services to a proudly diverse community;

Total population 186, 534, with 44,908 library members

Speakers of languages other than English exceed the metropolitan average, especially in the north of the city.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index shows high levels of disadvantage in the city, particularly in the north.

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data shows improvement in school readiness, but there is still work to do here.

An average of 49 people visit a Merri-bek Library each hour that they are open

Merri-bek has a higher than average number of lone person households and renters

Infographics

 Alignment

Sustainable Development Goals

These goals, developed as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), advocates for libraries to be recognised as essential partners for inclusive, sustainable development, through their work to provide meaningful access to information for all.

Merri-bek Libraries will aim to align with these goals and identify this work in our action planning.


Merri-bek Council Plan

Merri-bek Libraries will deliver against the Council Plan in the following areas;

- *Care for nature and climate resilience*
 - Supporting and encouraging the local community efforts to fight climate change
- *Healthy and inclusive communities*
 - Providing accessible spaces, facilities and programs that support community health and safety
 - Providing affordable activities and spaces for youth, seniors and families to participate and feel independent
 - Supporting local food initiatives to increase access to healthy, affordable food
- *Beautiful and liveable city*
 - Keeping public places, spaces and areas well-maintained, safe and inviting for community use
- *Thriving economy and culture*
 - Promoting and supporting local art, festivals, and events celebrating our community's diversity

Merri-bek Libraries

The Library Services Strategy 2019 set out 5 Key Priorities, and the following actions were implemented.

1. Connect

- Dedicated programming delivered for and with LGBTIQ+ community members, people living with a disability, First Nations people and young people
- Ongoing late night library hours and programming at Glenroy Library
- Community led events such as chess club, community jigsaws and craft clubs established
- Justices of the Peace at libraries
- Library Social Worker Program introduced to connect in need community members to services
- A workforce more reflective of our diverse community

2. Curate

- Programming Framework implemented
- New Library Management system, self-serve kiosks and Library app introduced
- More digital and streaming items available for loan
- Library of Things introduced
- Ganbo marra, First Nations collection established
- Bookshop style arrangement of Non-Fiction implemented

3. Discover

- MakerSpaces introduced at Brunswick, Coburg and Glenroy Libraries
- Collaboration with other areas of Council to deliver large-scale events at libraries

4. Learn

- Responsive program of digital support offered at the libraries
- More multi-cultural storytimes introduced

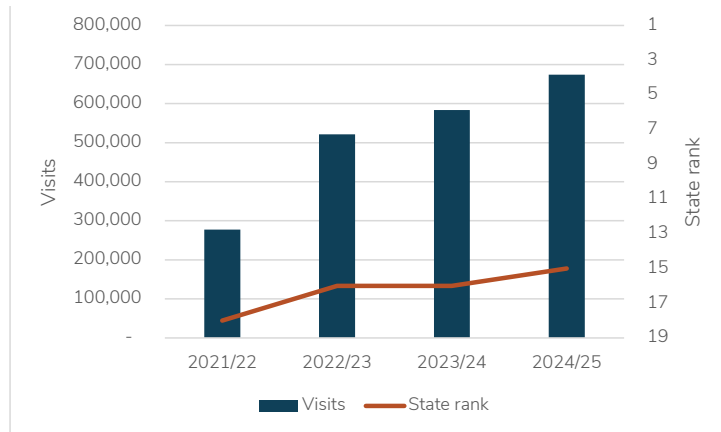
5. Place

- Increased opening hours in response to community need
- New Glenroy Library opened in the Glenroy Community Hub
- Coburg Library and Piazza planned
- Planning for Brunswick, Campbell-Turnbull and Fawkner Libraries to be renovated
- Facility upgrades to improve safety and amenity

Merri-bek Libraries over the years.

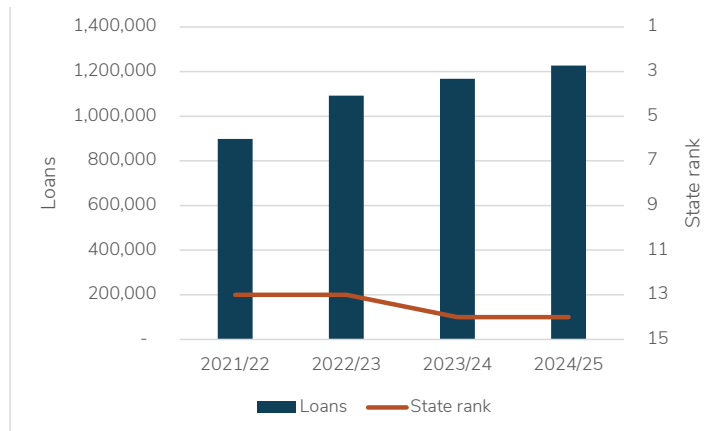
Visits

In a turnaround since the last library strategy, visits to Merri-bek Libraries are growing. Ensuring that we have buildings which can support this demand is a priority.



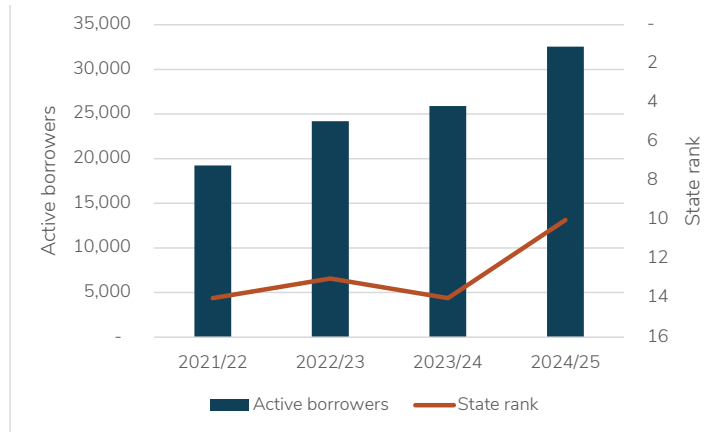
Loans

You told us that collections are important to you, and the numbers support this. We will be curating relevant and innovative collections to meet this demand.



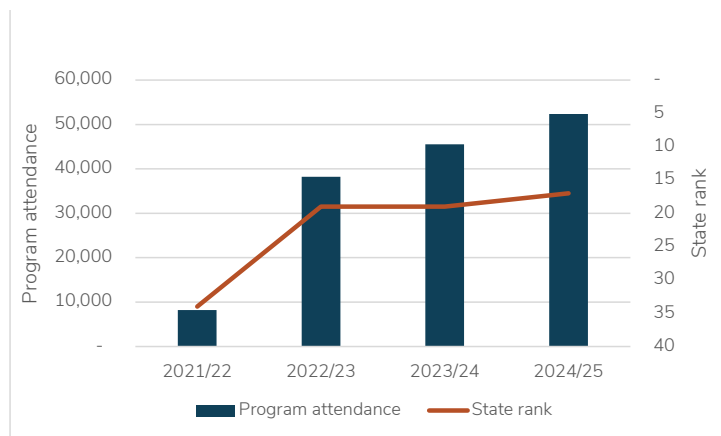
Active Borrowers

Merri-bek library members use of collections makes them one of the most active borrowing cohorts in the state. We will maintain collections which attract and support high usage.



Program Attendance

Attendance at library programs in Merri-bek has exceeded pre-pandemic numbers. We will target these programs so that they deliver the best value for the community and attendance numbers are maintained.



Community Engagement

Significant Community Engagement was undertaken to inform this new Library Strategy.

There were over 520 responses to the survey online and at in-person events, including;

- 84 people from the LGBTIQ+ Community
- 75 people living with or caring for someone with a disability
- Representation from a range of language groups

Over 100 people joined the online conversation

80 Children contributed their thoughts about the library at the Children's Forum

More than 100 Post-it notes were contributed by children in the libraries

Infographic

We are guided by the **Merri-bek Community Vision**

Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind.

- *We are a welcoming, safe and thriving community*
- *We are sustainable, and our environment is respected*
- *Our community is engaged and informed*
- *Our streets are full of life*

One community, proudly diverse.

Merri-bek Libraries

A contemporary library offering sustainable services and programs in welcoming spaces

What we heard	What we will deliver
<p>Welcoming places : Merri-bek Libraries are welcoming, flexible and inclusive places for everyone in the community.</p>	
<p>Libraries need flexible physical spaces to support a range of different uses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Coburg Library and Piazza • Program of library refurbishment to increase amenity, access to study space and support programming at Brunswick, Campbell-Turnbull and Fawkner Libraries
<p>Inspiring collections : Our collections inform, inspire and entertain, evolving to meet the changing needs and interests of the community</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical collections are still very important • Strong support for borrowing non-book items (Library of Things) • Demand for digital collections continues to grow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An exciting Library of Things • News about all the great library collections and how to best use them • Inspiring digital and physical collections • Increased digital help opportunities at the library
<p>Community connections : Programs and services provide more opportunities to create, celebrate, learn and connect at the library.</p>	
<p>Library programs are popular</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An annual large-scale celebration to bring the community together • Programs that support social cohesion, social connection and build a sense of community belonging • Range of programs designed specifically for and with our priority cohorts; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders - Migrant, refugee, and faith communities - People with disability - Women, girls, and gender diverse - LGBTIQ+ communities
<p>Contemporary library service : Library staff reflect our diverse community, and are trained to provide an excellent, tailored service to the Merri-bek community</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong support for libraries to be open more on evenings and weekends • Library staff are valued • Library Social Worker Program is valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening hours reflect community expectations, including for staffed library opening hours • The best possible service and support provided by skilled library staff

- An enhanced Library Social Work Program to support vulnerable community members

Merri-bek Libraries will not be implementing unstaffed library hours for the duration of this strategy.

7.6 CARBON OFFSETS UPDATE

Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade Sustainability and Climate

Officer recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes that a comprehensive review of local high-quality carbon offset options (including work continuing through Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action or NAGA) has not identified viable or affordable new alternatives.
2. Continues to pause the Carbon Offsets Policy and associated offset purchasing until local, high quality and affordable offset options become available, or Council considers its post-2030 corporate emissions target.
3. Notes that the organisation is continuing to reduce corporate carbon emissions with the goal of meeting the adopted 2030 target of an 80-100 per cent reduction.
4. Continues to undertake annual corporate carbon reporting, with biannual independent external verification (at a cost of no more than \$10,000 biannually, reserved from offset savings), to maintain public transparency and accountability.
5. Redirects the balance of the offsets budget, estimated at \$60,000 per year after independent verification costs, to Council's Corporate Carbon Reduction budget to support direct emissions reduction projects.

REPORT

Executive summary

In 2008, Council set its ambition to be carbon neutral as an organisation by 2012. This was achieved and Council was certified as carbon neutral in 2012 by the Federal Government's Climate Active program (previously NCOS), the third Local Government Area in Australia to do so and the second in Victoria.

Council has adopted an ambitious corporate carbon target, of 80-100 per cent reduction by 2030, against a 2011-12 baseline. This excludes offsets. This target was reiterated in the Climate Emergency Action Plan endorsed in 2025.

Council spent \$65,000 on offsets (on 6,600 tons offset) in 2024. If we had not reduced our emissions so significantly over the past decade, we would have needed to spend significantly more on offsets to achieve our certified carbon neutral status.

Since 2012, Council has purchased carbon offsets each year to address residual emissions and maintain Climate Active carbon neutral certification. In recent years, Council's Carbon Offsets Policy has guided the approach and criteria for the purchase of carbon offsets. In July 2025, Council resolved to pause its Carbon Offsets Policy for up to 12 months and investigate viable local offset options for Council's residual emissions, including through work with neighbouring councils and the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action. Council is therefore no longer certified carbon neutral but continues to work towards its 80 to 100 per cent reduction in corporate emissions by 2030, excluding offsets.

A review of options for local offsets, in collaboration with neighbouring councils and Northern Alliance of Greenhouse Action (NAGA) has not identified local offset options that are currently available, credible and affordable at the scale required. Officers therefore recommend that Council continue to pause offset purchasing and redirect the available offsets budget to direct emissions reduction projects within Council operations.

This approach prioritises actual emissions reductions over the purchase of offsets, while maintaining transparency through annual corporate carbon reporting and independent external verification. The funds previously allocated to offsets would be redirected to corporate carbon reduction initiatives (with a small amount reserved for biannual independent verification of Council's corporate carbon reporting).

Previous Council decisions

Carbon Offsets Policy Update – 9 July 2025

That Council:

1. *Acknowledges that Council has achieved significant reductions to its direct emissions over many years through investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency, fleet electrification and other measures, and that initiatives to reduce Council's remaining emissions while in train are more difficult and expensive than those already delivered.*
2. *Commits to ongoing direct action to reduce Merri-bek Council's operational emissions to zero, as outlined in the Merri-bek Zero Carbon – 2040 Framework corporate target of 80-100% reduction by 2030.*
3. *Commits to releasing a public statement indicating that Merri-bek City Council is determined to reach its target of carbon neutrality, with transparency in the way we work towards it.*
4. *Pauses its Carbon Offsets Purchase Policy for a period of up to 12 months and diverts the budget allocation for carbon offsets to develop options for verified local offsets for Council's residual emissions (including working with neighbouring councils and the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action where appropriate).*
5. *Notes that to obtain Climate Active certification in future would currently require that Council "catch up" 2025-26 offsets.*
6. *Continues to monitor developments with carbon offsets and receives a future report which outlines a timeline and investment for options for council to reach zero emissions over time, prioritising direct reductions.*

1. Policy context

Council was certified as carbon neutral in 2012 by the Federal Government's Climate Active Program (previously NCOS), the third Local Government Area (LGA) in Australia to do so and the second in Victoria. A number of Victorian councils have withdrawn from, or are no longer certified under, the Climate Active program. As at May 2026, the Climate Active register lists City of Melbourne, Moonee Valley City Council and Wyndham City Council as active, and City of Yarra as pending.

Certification allows Council to be publicly recognised for its achievements, helping the community recognise that Council is carbon neutral, and that this has been achieved in a credible and transparent way. There are other approaches for carbon reporting to be transparent and externally validated, and we will continue to explore these alternatives.

The Policy is supported by the *Merri-bek Zero Carbon – 2040 Framework*, and the *Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025-26 – 2030-31*.

Council has adopted an ambitious corporate carbon target, of 80-100 per cent reduction by 2030, against a 2011-12 baseline. This excludes offsets. This target was reaffirmed in the *Climate Emergency Action Plan* endorsed in 2025.

Merri-bek City Council first adopted its Carbon Offsets Policy in 2015, and this Policy was last updated and endorsed by Council 12 August 2020. The Policy outlines Council's approach to, and criteria for, the purchase of carbon offsets.

Under the Climate Active Standard, in order to be certified as carbon neutral organisations must measure their greenhouse gas emissions, reduce these where possible, offset their remaining emissions and prepare a publicly available report on their emissions trajectory.

Council paused its Climate Active certification after the July 2025 Council resolution.

2. Background

Council's Carbon Offsets Purchase Policy

In 2008, Council set its ambition to be carbon neutral as an organisation by 2012. This was achieved and Council was certified as carbon neutral in 2012 by the Federal Government's Climate Active program (previously NCOS), the third Local Government Area in Australia to do so and the second in Victoria.

Under the Climate Active Standard, to be certified as carbon neutral, organisations must measure their greenhouse gas emissions, reduce these where possible, purchase offsets for residual emissions and prepare a publicly available report.

Each year since 2012, along with taking direct action to reduce emissions, Council has purchased sufficient carbon offsets to cover our residual emissions, in order to be 'certified carbon neutral' as an organisation. In recent years, Council's *Carbon Offsets Purchase Policy 2020 – 2024* has guided our approach and criteria for the purchase of carbon offsets.

Council's *Carbon Offsets Purchase Policy 2020-2024* requires that Council purchase offsets eligible under the Climate Active Standard. It also lists the following desirable criteria:

- Offsets obtained via a project delivered in Australia.
- Preference for projects with social and/or environmental co-benefits (beyond greenhouse gas mitigation), including verification processes for example 1) Agriculture activities (e.g. soil carbon), 2) Vegetation activities (e.g. revegetation, avoided deforestation) or 3) Savannah burning.
- Cost per tonne CO₂e.

It is important to note that all carbon offsets purchased have met the requirements of the Policy and been the highest quality options available. Most recently, Council spent \$65,000 on offsets (on 6,600 tons offset) in 2024. If we had not reduced our emissions so significantly over the past decade, we would have needed to spend significantly more on offsets to achieve our certified carbon neutral status.

Through a range of initiatives, including purchasing electricity from clean renewable wind energy (MREP), upgrading fleet to electric vehicles where possible, electrification of heating, street lighting upgrades and energy efficiency upgrades (a Council program operating since 2011), Council has reduced its operational emissions by 69 per cent since 2011-12 using the boundary used to establish the baseline in 2011-12.

All Council's annual carbon reports under the Climate Active standard are also publicly available from the Climate Active website (<https://www.climateactive.org.au/buy-climate-active/certified-members/merri-bek-city-council>).

In revisiting the Carbon Offsets Purchase Policy at a Council meeting in July 2025, Council resolved to pause the policy for up to 12 months, and to investigate viable local offset options. This in turn pauses the related purchase of offsets.

In November 2025 Council released a public statement ([Merri-bek's commitment to net zero](#)) in response to the third item of the resolution.

In response to item 4 and 5 of the Council resolution, work was undertaken to understand options for local offsets, including working with neighbouring councils and the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action to inform future options.

The work undertaken to develop options for verified local offsets for Council's residual emissions did not require funding except for officer time. As a result, the budget for this financial year remains unspent.

Why purchase offsets

Under the Climate Active Standard, in order to be certified as carbon neutral organisations must:

- measure their greenhouse gas emissions
- reduce these where possible
- purchase offsets for the remaining emissions and
- prepare a publicly available report.

While Climate Active certification and offset purchasing are paused, Council is no longer certified carbon neutral and is not required to purchase offsets under the Climate Active Standard. This does not change Council's adopted corporate emissions reduction target of an 80 to 100 per cent reduction by 2030, which excludes offsets.

Council will continue to measure and reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and prepare an annual publicly available corporate carbon report.

3. Issues

The key issue for Council is not whether to maintain climate ambition, but how best to use limited resources to achieve real emissions reduction. Given the lack of viable local offset options, officers recommend prioritising direct emissions reduction within Council operations over purchasing offsets. This approach is consistent with Council's adopted 2030 target, maintains public transparency through independently verified reporting, and avoids reliance on offset products that may not meet Council's expectations for local benefit, credibility or value for money.

A review of options for local offsets in collaboration with neighbouring councils and Northern Alliance of Greenhouse Action (NAGA) has not identified alternative local offsets that are available, credible and affordable.

Council recognises the strong community and Councillor interest in local offset options such as tree planting, revegetation and urban greening. These initiatives can deliver important local benefits, including canopy cover, biodiversity, cooling, amenity and community resilience. However, for tree planting to be treated as a formal carbon offset for Council's residual emissions, the carbon sequestration must be measurable, additional, permanent, independently verified and available at sufficient scale. The review undertaken to date has not identified a local tree-planting or revegetation offset option that is currently available, credible, affordable and scalable enough to meet Council's residual emissions offset requirements.

This does not preclude Council continuing to invest in local tree planting, urban greening or biodiversity initiatives. Rather, it means these initiatives should be recognised primarily for their local environmental, resilience and community benefits, unless and until a suitable verified local offset model becomes available.

Local offset schemes, including tree planting and revegetation, are currently more expensive than international offsets (\$40-60/tonne CO₂e compared to \$10/tonne CO₂e) for international offsets) and/or have immature certification structures. As a result, they are not recommended as Council's primary approach to addressing residual corporate emissions at this time.

The decision before Council is about whether to continue purchasing offsets and seeking carbon neutral certification, not whether to maintain Council's emissions reduction target. Carbon neutral certification requires the purchase of offsets for residual emissions. Council's adopted 2030 corporate emissions reduction target is separate from certification and is focused on reducing actual operational emissions, excluding offsets.

This report outlines options for Council's future approach to offsets. The options are essentially:

- pausing the purchase of offsets indefinitely (until better options become available), and redirecting funds to direct emissions reduction initiatives (Officer recommendation), or
- purchasing offsets available for Council's residual emissions.

The assumption has been made that this decision will be aligned to the timeframe associated with the current endorsed emissions reduction target for 2030. At this time Council's progress will be reviewed.

Both options require annual corporate carbon reporting. It is recommended that independent external verification is undertaken every second year, at an estimated cost of \$10,000 each time, to maintain public transparency and accountability.

Options to proceed

Two options are considered below, to redirect the \$70,000 per year that has previously been spent purchasing offsets.

- **Option 1:** Return \$60,000 to consolidated revenue and retain \$10,000 for carbon reporting verification every second year.
- **Option 2:** Invest the \$70,000 offsets budget in:
 - Independently verifying our carbon reporting every second year, maintaining transparency (approx. \$10,000 every second year) and
 - Invest in further projects that tangibly reduce Council's emissions (approx. \$60,000 p.a.) – e.g. electrifying buildings

Alternatively, Council could make the decision to purchase higher quality offsets, with options including:

- **Option 3:** Increase investment to offset Council's reported residual emissions with higher quality local offsets (around \$192,000 to \$300,000 per year). This could be done through the purchase of:
 - Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs). High quality offsets, which align with the 2020 endorsed Carbon Offsets Purchasing Policy. \$40-60 per tonne greenhouse gas emissions which is more expensive than alternatives.
 - A local carbon offset program such as GreenFleet offering revegetation offsets for approximately \$25/tonne greenhouse gases or Grow Towards Zero project ([Grow Towards Zero – Cultivating Community Carbon in Central Victoria | North Central Catchment Management Authority](#)) led by North Central Catchment Management Authority.
- **Option 4:** Use the existing budget to purchase as many higher quality offsets as it will cover, acknowledging this would not cover all Council's reported residual emissions.
- **Option 5:** Return to council's previous model, purchasing Climate Active standard offsets, purchasing largely international offsets. Council would need to "catch up" reporting and offsets for 2024-25 and 2025-26. The policy prioritises:

- Offsets obtained via a project delivered in Australia.
- Preference for projects with social and/or environmental co-benefits, including verification processes – e.g. agriculture (e.g. soil carbon), vegetation (e.g. revegetation, avoided deforestation), or savannah burning.
- Cost per tonne CO2e.

Council has reduced its operational emissions by 69 per cent against the 2011-12 baseline. This has been through renewable energy, fleet electrification, street lighting upgrades, and energy efficiency upgrades.

However to meet the target of at least 80 per cent by 2030, Council must achieve a further 11 per cent reduction in corporate emissions.

The largest remaining corporate emissions are generated by fossil gas used in aquatic centres and diesel used in waste trucks and other heavy fleet for which electric options are not yet available. It is likely that achieving the remaining 11 per cent of emissions, will be more complex and costly than those already delivered. It is likely to rely on technology that is either relatively new (or existing technology applied in a new context) or not yet commercially available and more expensive than projects already delivered.

Based on the current draft 5-year capital works plan, emissions reduction most achievable before 2030 include electrification of non-aquatic sites, light and commercial fleet electrification and interim use of bio-fuels to partially replace diesel until heavy vehicle zero emissions vehicles becomes available.

Officers therefore recommend option 2, that Council continue to pause offset purchasing and redirect the available offsets budget to direct emissions reduction projects within Council. This approach will also reduce the gap to reach our 2030 target.

The \$60,000 would be used to support practical projects that reduce Council's direct operational emissions and help progress Council's adopted corporate emissions reduction target. This may include works such as small-scale electrification of Council buildings, solar PV upgrades, energy efficiency improvements, and supporting infrastructure for the transition away from fossil fuels.

Projects would be prioritised based on emissions reduction potential, value for money, asset readiness, operational need and deliverability within the available budget. While the funding is modest relative to Council's broader emissions reduction goal, it will enable targeted works that reduce future energy costs, support implementation of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and build momentum for larger emissions reduction projects over time.

Community impact

No direct community impact is expected as a result of a decision regarding the purchase of carbon offsets and associated policy decisions.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Both the purchase of carbon offsets and direct emissions reductions help reduce Council's environmental impacts and are in line with Council's commitments.

Economic sustainability implications

Council spent \$65,000 on 6,600 offsets units in 2024. In seeking to meet its carbon reduction target of 80-100 per cent by 2030, Council has reduced its operational emissions by 69 per cent against the 2011-12 baseline (considering the same emissions categories as the baseline). If we had not reduced our emissions so significantly, we would need to spend significantly more on offsets to achieve a carbon neutral status.

Legal and risk considerations

Ceasing to purchase offsets is not considered to present a significant reputational risk if Council clearly communicates that the budget is being redirected to direct emissions reduction and that annual corporate carbon reporting will continue to be independently verified. The greater reputational risk would arise if Council were perceived to be reducing transparency or stepping back from its adopted emissions reduction target.

Human Rights consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

The *Council Plan 2021-2025* notes that:

- Climate change does not affect everyone equally. People suffering from socioeconomic inequality feel the effects of climate change more than others. Our commitment is to provide strong leadership by reducing the greenhouse gas pollution that causes climate change and by proactively preparing to avoid, withstand and recover from the inevitable impacts of climate change.

4. Community consultation and engagement

The first Carbon Offsets Policy was adopted by Council in 2015, and this Policy was last updated for 2020-2024 and endorsed by Council 12 August 2020.

Advice and information was sought from officers across NAGA and other alliances including Goulburn Murray Climate Alliance, as well as North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) regarding their Grow Towards Zero project.

As an internal policy change full engagement not required.

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

Communications

The promotion of Council's current and any future policy communication opportunities will be promoted through a range of channels including newsletters and social media as the opportunity or need arises.

Ongoing reporting documents shall be available to the public on council's website.

5. Officer declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and resources implications

There is no net budget impact from this report – it proposes to reallocate existing budget towards direction action initiatives.

No additional funds are requested to implement the outcomes of this recommendation.

7. Implementation

Council will continue to publish its annual corporate carbon report, and have this externally verified. Officers will maintain a watching brief regarding the maturity of local carbon offset initiatives. These will be presented among other options when Council considers its post-2030 carbon targets.

Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.7 RATES HARDSHIP POLICY

Acting Director Business Transformation, Yvonne Callanan
Financial Services

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopts the revised Rates Hardship Policy (provided in Attachment 1) to this report.
2. Writes to the submitter to thank them for their submission and advise them of the outcomes of Council's decision, including as it relates to their specific submission.

REPORT

Executive Summary

Council's draft updated Rates Hardship Policy was presented to Council at its meeting on 8 April 2026, Council endorsed the Draft Rates Hardship Policy for community consultation, ahead of receiving the final policy for adoption at the June meeting. On advice from officers, the consultation period was extended from the original proposed period (5 May – 19 May) to commence earlier, on the 28 April via Conversations Merri-bek and other channels.

The Draft Rates Hardship Policy was comprehensively revised to ensure alignment with the *Ministerial Guidelines Relating to the Payment of Rates and Charges* issued in late 2025, and to reflect contemporary best practice. The review resulted in several substantial changes, including:

- The removal of all non-rates hardship provisions from this policy, with those matters to be addressed through a separate standalone policy.
- Structural and procedural changes to ensure consistency with the Ministerial Guidelines and the *Local Government Act 2020*.
- Minor administrative and operational updates to improve clarity, consistency and application.

At the close of the submission period, one submission was received. A summary of the submission received, together with Council Officer response is provided in the issues section of this report. This report is recommending minor administrative changes to the Draft Hardship Policy as a result of the community consultation process. These are further discussed in the issues section of this report.

Previous Council Decisions

Draft Rates Hardship Policy – 8 April 2026

That Council:

1. *Endorses the Draft Rates Hardship Policy (provided as Attachment 1 to this report), for the purposes of community consultation.*
2. *Invites feedback on the Draft Rates Hardship Policy for the 10-day consultation period from Tuesday 5 May until Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 5pm.*
3. *Makes the Draft Rates Hardship Policy available on Conversations Merri-bek website and hard copies available on request.*
4. *Receives a further report back at its meeting on 10 June 2026 outlining any feedback received and presenting the final policy for consideration and adoption.*

Hardship Policy – 14 September 2022

That Council:

1. *Adopts the revised Hardship Policy, at Attachment 1 to this report;*
2. *Writes to submitters to thank them for their submission and advise them of the outcomes of Council's decision, including as it relates to their specific submission.*

Review of Hardship Policy – 13 July 2022

That Council:

1. *Endorses the Draft Hardship Policy (provided as Attachment 1 to this report), for the purpose of community exhibition.*
2. *Invites feedback on the Draft Hardship Policy for the 10-day public consultation period from Tuesday 2 August until Tuesday 16 August 2022 at 5pm.*
3. *Makes the Draft Hardship Policy available on the Council website and hard copies available at the three customer service centres and all libraries.*
4. *Receives a further report at its meeting on 14 September 2022 outlining any feedback received on the Draft Hardship Policy; and presenting a final Proposed Hardship Policy for consideration for adoption.*
5. *Extends the application of the COVID Hardship Policy until 30 September 2022.*

COVID-19 Response – Update – 13 October 2021

That Council, in response to the ongoing pandemic emergency, resolves to:

...

2. *Extend the operation of the COVID-19 Hardship Policy, with amendments as attached.*

...

Closures and Modifications in response to COVID-19 Emergency – 25 March 2020

That Council:

...

4. *Adopts the COVID-19 Financial Hardship Policy at Attachment 1 to this report.*

...

1. Policy Context

Council adopted its current Hardship Policy (“the Policy”) in September 2022 in response to the prolonged financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community. The Policy has been reviewed and updated to incorporate the *Ministerial Guidelines Relating to the Payment of Rates and Charges 2025* (The Ministerial Guidelines).

This report supports Council's continuing commitment to open and accountable management of the financial resources of Merri-bek on behalf of its ratepayers.

2. Background

The original policy was designed to provide extended support to individuals and businesses and to address the findings of the Victorian Ombudsman's *Hardship – Local Councils* report (May 2021).

Since that time, the regulatory environment has changed. In late 2025, the Minister for Local Government released updated *Ministerial Guidelines Relating to the Payment of Rates and Charges*, which introduce strengthened expectations for councils in the management of hardship and recovery processes.

A review of the existing policy identified that it no longer reflects the structure, terminology and operational requirements of the 2025 Guidelines. The policy also combines rates and non-rates hardship provisions, which creates ambiguity in scope and limits procedural clarity.

The updated draft policy addresses these gaps by solely focusing on rates and charges hardship, aligning with the Ministerial Guidelines, and separating non-rates hardship into a standalone policy. This ensures Council's framework remains compliant, contemporary and fit for purpose.

3. Issues

As well as responding to the ministerial Guidelines, the policy has been updated to cover minor administration updates and increased transparency around the selling of land to recover unpaid rates and charges.

Response to the Ministerial Guidelines

The policy was updated to reflect the Ministerial Guidelines that were issued in late 2025 by clearly distinguishing types of hardship, pausing all recovery action during assessments, suspending interest during payment or hardship arrangements, and allowing interest waivers where financial hardship is proven.

It introduces flexible, capacity-to-pay plans, embeds a trauma-informed and vulnerability-aware approach, removes automatic exclusions, and strengthens transparency through written decisions, reasons for refusal and independent internal review. The policy also sets a 10-day assessment timeframe for hardship decisions and ensures court action or land sale is only pursued once all hardship and engagement options have been fully exhausted.

Sale of land to recover unpaid rates and charges

To ensure transparency, Council's decisions commencing the process of selling and the final outcome regarding the sale or transfer of the land, will be recorded and made public having regard for information that is deemed confidential.

Each financial year in September, Council will receive a report documenting outstanding rates balances as well as officers' assessment on identifying land that may meet the legislative criteria for sale or transfer. Officers may apply additional criteria such as whether a property is a primary place of residence when assessing which properties (if any) to recommend to Councillors to commence the sale process.

Submissions received on the Draft Rates Hardship Policy

Council received one submission relating to the hardship policy as detailed below:

Submission section:	Section 6 — Review trigger for cost-of-living pressures
Submission:	The policy lists triggers for early review (legislative change, audit, Ombudsman recommendations) but omits significant economic events (e.g. housing stress, cost-of-living spikes). Given recent economic pressures, adding this as a review trigger would demonstrate responsiveness.
Officer response:	No change recommended to the Policy. The policy defines financial hardship as: <i>Financial hardship exists where a ratepayer does not have the financial capacity to pay their rates or charges and doing so would prevent them from affording the basic necessities of life for themselves or their dependants, in accordance with the Ministerial Guidelines and sections 171 and 171A of the Local Government Act 1989.</i>

	<p>And Hardship as:</p> <p><i>Hardship exists where a ratepayer is experiencing difficulty paying their rates or charges in their current circumstances, but payment would not necessarily prevent them from affording the basic necessities of life.</i></p> <p>Each individual ratepayer's circumstances are different and the applications are reviewed case by case because economic impacts can affect everyone differently.</p> <p>The review of hardship applications undertaken under this policy takes all information into consideration to ensure hardship case outcomes remain consistent. This process ensures procedural fairness across all ratepayers. Based on the above, officers do not believe we need to single out cost of living as it's covered in the more broader term of hardship and financial hardship.</p>
--	--

Other administrative changes

One minor wording change is also being recommended by Council Officers.

Section 4.6 (Interest on overdue rates and charges) – the previous wording stated *Where a ratepayer is experiencing hardship, consideration will be given to waiving of interest for up to one year depending on the ratepayers circumstance.*

Officers are proposing that the wording 'for up to one year' is removed. All interest waivers will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis in alignment with instruments of delegation or sub-delegation.

Community impact

The policy supports the purpose of the Ministerial Guidelines which is to ensure fair, consistent, and compassionate treatment for ratepayers across all Victorian municipalities.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

There are no climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Economic sustainability implications

The policy allows for special payment arrangements to be entered into by both commercial and residential debtors.

Legal and risk considerations

The policy ensures that ratepayers are encouraged to utilise financial counselling, legal and other supports. Legal action to recover debt is seen as the last resort.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, and this policy addresses the following Human Rights considerations:

- The right to privacy and reputation
- The right to protection of families and children.

4. Community consultation and engagement

In line with Council's Community Engagement Policy the Draft Rates Hardship Policy was extended from the original Council endorsed public exhibition period (5 May – 19 May) to Tuesday 28 April 2026 until Tuesday 19 May 2026. The one submission received is detailed in the Issues section of this report.

Email address/phone numbers were provided as well, for those who did not wish to use the online form. Links to the policy consultation process were distributed across the following networks to enhance the consultation process:

- Revenue Team communications,
- Trader Associations newsletters,
- Our primary Financial Councillor,
- Customer Services and Libraries,
- Community Connectors,
- Councillor Bulletin, and
- HelpHub.

Affected persons rights and interests

The rights of persons affected by Council's decision have been provided with the opportunity to contribute their views through the Community Engagement process.

Communications

Subject to Council's decision, when endorsed, the revised policy will be uploaded to the internet as a public policy and communicated to relevant Council officers.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

The recommendations set out in this report responds to the financial difficulties being experienced by residential, commercial and industrial rate payers across the municipality as well as the Ministerial Guidelines 2025. The recommendations proposed seek to balance the need for council to manage the rates debtor balances and impacts on council cash flow against the difficulties being experienced by residents.

The changes proposed in this report are not expected to materially impact the performance against budget or cashflow.

7. Implementation

Subject to Council's decision, when endorsed, the revised policy will be uploaded to the internet as a public policy and communicated to relevant Council officers.

Attachment/s

- [1](#) Rates Hardship Policy - Draft Update - 2026 D26/31343



Policy ID No

Date Authorised by Chief Executive Officer or Council:

Commencement Date:

Review Date

Responsible Department

Business Transformation

<Insert Date signed here>

DRAFT

1. Introduction

This policy outlines the principles that Council officers must apply when managing rates and charges and providing support to ratepayers experiencing hardship.

2. Context

2.1 Alignment

This Rates Hardship Policy has been developed to provide a consistent, long-term framework for supporting ratepayers experiencing hardship. It incorporates ongoing assistance provisions and responds to the findings of the Victorian Ombudsman's *Investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship* (May 2021) and the *Ministerial Guidelines for Councils Relating to Payment of Rates and Charges* (the Guidelines) published December 2025.

2.2 Organisational Context

Council levies rates and charges on rateable properties to fund the delivery of services and infrastructure for the community. These amounts are invoiced in advance and may be paid by the due date or through an approved payment plan.

While Council has a responsibility to ensure rates and charges are paid to support its operations, it also recognises that some ratepayers may experience financial hardship that affects their ability to meet these obligations.

In managing rates and charges, Council is required to balance the need for financial sustainability with fairness, transparency and equity. Where a ratepayer is experiencing hardship, appropriate support and relief may be provided in accordance with this Policy and the Ministerial Guidelines.

3. Objectives

To provide a transparent and fair framework for the management of rates and charges, ensuring Council's revenue is protected while supporting ratepayers who are experiencing hardship.

This Policy aims to ensure that Council manages rates and charges in a way that supports its financial sustainability, while also considering the individual circumstances of ratepayers and the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1989*, the *Local Government Act 2020* and Ministerial Guidelines.

The policy is guided by the following principles:

- Flexible, place-based payment options that respond to local community needs and hardship circumstances.
- Clear, accessible and easy-to-understand communication through multiple channels.
- Fair, equitable, compassionate and proportionate treatment of all ratepayers.
- Protection of privacy and confidentiality in accordance with relevant legislation.

- Proactive approaches that reduce the cost and escalation of debt for both Council and ratepayers.
- Continuous improvement through performance measurement, review and adaptation to community needs.
- Community-centred, place-based design that considers local issues and engages local support networks.

4. Policy details

4.1 Payment Terms

Rates and charges are payable in accordance with the instalment due dates set out on Council's rates and charges notice, as prescribed under the Local Government Act 1989.

Where Council permits payment by instalments, the due date of the first instalment is taken to be the due date for payment in full, unless an alternative plan has been approved.

Where a ratepayer has entered into an approved payment plan, direct debit, or other agreed payment plan, the due dates will be those specified in the plan, rather than the legislated instalment dates.

4.2 Flexible payment options available

Council offers a range of flexible payment options and methods for payments of rates and charges including:

- In person at Council offices (cheques, money orders, EFTPOS or cash up to limits as set in the cash handling policy at Coburg and Brunswick),
- 10-monthly or quarterly instalment direct debit,
- Centrepay,
- BPAY,
- Australia Post (over the counter, over the phone or online),
- Mail (Cheques and money orders only), and
- Credit-card (Visa or Mastercard).

4.3 Current discounts/rebates available

- Municipal Pensioner Rates Concession

4.4 Payment Plan

Any ratepayer who is having difficulty paying their rates or charges is encouraged to contact Council's Revenue Services Unit to discuss a suitable payment plan that:

- reflects their capacity to pay,
- is tailored to their personal and local circumstances, and
- provides a reasonable and manageable repayment timeframe.

Council adopts a flexible, place-based approach to payment plans and will offer a range of flexible payment options as detailed in section 4.2 that align with the needs of the local community, including those experiencing vulnerability or financial hardship.

Where a payment plan is approved, the agreed instalment amounts and due dates will apply in place of the legislated instalment dates. Council may utilise an external recovery agency to assist with the administration and monitoring of payment plans where appropriate.

An application for a payment plan is available on Council's website and in hard copy at customer service points and include contact details for assistance. The application clearly states:

- what information may be required,
- that further information may be requested if needed, and
- that Council will notify the applicant of the outcome within 10 business days.

Verbal applications are permitted and must meet the same information requirements as written applications. All applications will be supported by Council's standard identity verification processes.

If a payment plan is approved, this will clearly state the schedule of payments, including amount and length of time. The process for which a payment plan can be cancelled will also be communicated. If a payment plan is not accepted, the reason behind the decision will be communicated and refer ratepayers to the internal review process.

4.5 Formal Debt Recovery and Legal Action

Council will make reasonable attempts to contact ratepayers about overdue rates or charges using early and cost-effective methods. Council may issue reminder notices, statements, emails or make phone calls. Where a payment plan, deferral or hardship application is in place and being complied with, recovery and enforcement action will be suspended. Recovery action will also be suspended while a hardship or payment plan application is under assessment.

If no payment, response, payment plan or hardship application is in place, and all reasonable engagement options have been exhausted, the account may be referred for formal recovery action.

Council will seek to minimise debt recovery costs for both Council and ratepayers by prioritising early and flexible engagement. Any recovery costs incurred through formal enforcement may be recovered from the ratepayer, subject to legislative requirements. Details of applicable debt recovery fees and charges will be published on Council's website.

Where a formal recovery is required, the process documented in Appendix 1 will apply.

4.6 Interest on overdue rates and charges

Interest may be charged on overdue rates and charges in accordance with section 172 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, at a rate fixed by the Minister under the *Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983*.

Interest will be charged following each legislated instalment due date and calculated from the relevant due date, unless an alternative payment plan has been approved.

Interest will not be charged where a ratepayer has an approved payment plan, deferral or hardship payment plan in place and is complying with the agreed terms. Where a ratepayer is experiencing hardship, consideration will be given to waiving of interest depending on the ratepayer circumstances.

4.7 Hardship (Deferral of Rates and Charges)

Hardship exists where payment of rates or charges would cause difficulty to a ratepayer in their individual circumstances at the time the amount is payable, even where financial hardship is not present. In accordance with section 170 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, Council may approve a deferral, in full or in part, of rates or charges for a defined period where payment would cause hardship.

A deferral provides a temporary pause on payment obligations and is intended to assist ratepayers experiencing short-term or unexpected difficulty. Interest will not be charged during an approved deferral period.

4.8 Financial Hardship (Waiver of Rates, Charges or Interest)

Financial hardship exists where a ratepayer lacks the financial capacity to meet their rates or charges and payment would prevent them from affording the necessities of life for themselves or their dependants.

Financial hardship may arise from a wide range of personal, social, economic or systemic circumstances, including but not limited to loss or reduction of income, employment difficulties, illness or injury, mental health issues, family violence or economic abuse, elder abuse, death of a family member, addiction, gambling, scams or fraud, incarceration, natural disasters, or barriers to accessing essential services.

For the purposes of sections 171 and 171A of the *Local Government Act 1989*, where a ratepayer is experiencing such circumstances and payment of rates or charges would compromise their ability to meet basic living needs, such as food, housing, essential utilities, medical care, transport, childcare, education or insurance, they will be considered to be in financial hardship.

Consideration will be given to an approval of a waiver, in full or in part, of rates, charges or interest where payment would result in financial hardship. Financial hardship will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the ratepayer's individual circumstances and capacity to pay.

4.9 Hardship Application process

Any ratepayer who is having difficulty paying their rates or charges is encouraged to contact Council's Revenue Services Unit directly, via Council's online, or written hardship or payment plan request process. A ratepayer may request that Council, or its representatives, use an interpreter and/or translator when communicating with them, and such a request will not be unreasonably refused.

Where a ratepayer indicates that they are experiencing financial difficulty, Council will discuss the options available, which may include:

- A short-term payment extension of up to 4-weeks, based on the ratepayer's circumstances and capacity to pay.
- A rates payment plan, negotiated to reflect the ratepayer's capacity to pay. The length and instalment amounts will be set to ensure the plan is realistic and sustainable, rather than subject to a fixed recovery period.

- A deferral of rates or charges for up to 3-months, where payment would cause hardship. The length of the deferral will be determined based on the ratepayer's circumstances and legislative requirements.
- An application for financial hardship, where payment of rates or charges would prevent the ratepayer from affording the necessities of life.
- An application for exceptional circumstances, where it would be unjust for the general rule to apply due to the ratepayer's particular circumstances.

Where an application for financial hardship is made, a referral to an independent financial counsellor or support service may be made with the ratepayer's consent. Any information or report provided by a counsellor will be considered as supporting information but is not mandatory for a decision. The application will be assessed by the appropriate delegated Council officer, and the ratepayer will be advised in writing of the outcome and any relief measures approved.

Payment plans are to be designed to cover current rates and charges, where reasonably possible, to prevent the account from falling further into arrears. Where a ratepayer is unable to meet an agreed payment plan, or indicates that further support is required, a review will be undertaken to reassess the payment plan or hardship status. Interest will not be applied where a ratepayer has an approved hardship plan in place and is complying with the agreed terms.

4.10 Assessment process

The following factors may be considered when assessing an application for financial hardship. Including, but are not limited to, whether the ratepayer:

- has experienced circumstances of hardship (whether short term or ongoing) that will affect their ability to pay.
- has indicated that paying rates or charges would prevent them from affording the necessities of life for themselves or their dependants.
- is receiving Centrelink or other government benefits.
- is on a low or fixed income, including pension or superannuation.
- has been referred by, or is supported by, an accredited financial counsellor, welfare agency or legal assistance service.
- has a payment history that indicates difficulty meeting obligations in the past.
- has provided relevant supporting information; and
- where available or relevant, has provided an independent financial counsellor's written report.

Each application will be assessed on its individual merits and circumstances. Council will not apply automatic exclusions based on property type, land use, ownership of multiple properties or residential status. Decisions will be made having regard to the ratepayer's overall financial circumstances and capacity to pay.

Where supporting documentation is required, Council will clearly advise the ratepayer of what is needed and provide reasonable timeframes for submission. Council will aim to assess applications and notify the ratepayer of the outcome within 10 business days of receiving all required information.

Additional information will only be requested that is directly relevant and necessary to make a decision. All information will be collected and managed in accordance with privacy legislation and Council's privacy policies.

Examples of information that may be considered relevant includes, but is not limited to:

- government agency documentation (e.g. Centrelink, ATO, NDIA, Victoria Police, Courts);
- certified documentation (e.g. medical certificates, financial counsellor referrals, legal documents, statutory declarations); and
- personal financial information where necessary (e.g. payslips, evidence of job loss or reduced hours, unpaid bills, bank statements).

4.11 Review of Decisions and Timeframes

Applications for hardship and financial hardship will be assessed as soon as practicable and aims to provide a written outcome within 10 business days of receiving all required information. Where further information is required, the ratepayer will be advised of what is needed and the assessment timeframe will pause until the information is received.

A ratepayer may request an internal review of a decision within 10 business days of being notified of the outcome. Reviews will be conducted by a Council officer who was not involved in the original decision. Council aims to complete internal reviews within 10 business days and will provide the ratepayer with a written outcome and reasons for the decision.

4.12 Assessment Outcomes

Following assessment of a hardship or financial hardship application, a determination will be made as to the most appropriate outcome having regard to the ratepayer's circumstances, capacity to pay, and the principles of this Policy.

Possible outcomes may include one or more of the following:

- approval of a payment plan or revised payment plan.
- approval of a short-term payment extension.
- approval of a deferral of rates or charges for a defined period.
- approval of a waiver, in full or in part, of rates, charges or interest where financial hardship is established.
- suspension or waiver of interest and lawful recovery costs where appropriate.
- referral to external support services or an independent financial counsellor; or
- refusal of the application, where hardship or financial hardship is not established.

All outcomes will be proportionate to the ratepayer's circumstances and aligned to their capacity to pay. Where an application is refused, a written response with reasons will be provided and the ratepayer will be advised of available alternative options, including payment plans.

4.13 Sale of Land to Recover Unpaid Rates and Charges

Council may sell land, or cause land to be transferred into Council ownership, to recover unpaid rates or charges in accordance with section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. Council may only consider the sale or transfer of land where all of the following apply:

- The amount due for rates or charges (including interest and enforcement costs) is more than three (3) years overdue.
- No current plan exists for payment of the amount (including a payment plan); and
- Council has obtained a Court order requiring payment of the amount (or part of the amount).

For the purposes of this Policy, a plan is not current if any terms of the payment plan are not being met.

Each financial year, Council will receive a report in September documenting outstanding rates balances as well as officers' assessment on identifying land that may meet the legislative criteria for sale or transfer. Any land identified will be subject to an internal assessment and approval process, including legal review, prior to any enforcement action.

Before selling or transferring land, Council must serve written notice on all persons who appear to have an estate or interest in the land, requiring payment of the outstanding amount and providing a copy of section 181.

- Give public notice of its intention to sell or transfer the land; and
- If the land is to be sold by auction, notify affected persons in writing of the auction details.

Council must provide:

- at least four (4) weeks' notice before any sale or transfer; and
- at least fourteen (14) days' notice before any auction.

To ensure transparency Council's decisions commencing the process of selling and the final outcome regarding the sale or transfer of the land will be recorded and made public having regard for information that is deemed confidential.

4.14 Ratepayer responsibilities

When hardship or financial hardship assistance is approved, the ratepayer must enter, and continue to meet, the agreed payment plan for their rates and charges.

If the ratepayer fails to comply with the agreed plan and does not contact Council to discuss alternative arrangements, hardship support may be withdrawn, interest may be reinstated in line with legislation, and debt recovery action may resume.

Ratepayers must provide information that is accurate, complete and not misleading. Where relief has been granted based on financial hardship, the ratepayer must also notify Council of any material change in their circumstances that may affect their eligibility for ongoing support.

In accordance with section 171A of the *Local Government Act 1989*, penalties may apply where a ratepayer provides false or misleading information or fails to notify Council of a relevant change in circumstances.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities are outlined in this Policy:

Role	Responsibility
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve a waiver in full or in part, of rates and charges.
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review and approve the merit of applications for exceptional circumstances as referred by the CFO
Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals and waivers to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff. - Instruct an agent acting for Council to take steps necessary to recover overdue rates and charges, including bringing court proceedings on behalf of Council - Review applications for exceptional circumstances that requests a waiver or partial waiver of rates or charges. - On an annual basis the Chief Financial Officer will provide council a list of ratepayers with high value outstanding debt in relation to rates and charges for consideration to progress to the sale or acquisition of land in satisfaction of the outstanding debt. The report will also include the final outcome of properties previously referred.
Unit Manager Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversight of overall debt levels and to ensure appropriate action is implemented in a timely manner. - Approve applications for payment deferrals and waivers to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff.
Team Leader Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals and waivers to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff. - Consider payment plans with longer timeframes to allow for cases of extenuating circumstances (for example long term illness or unemployment)
Senior Revenue & Property Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff.
Revenue Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve applications for payment deferrals for no longer than 12-months to a limit set by the S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff.

6. Monitoring, Evaluating and Review

Finance will monitor the operation of this Policy to ensure it is applied consistently, fairly and in accordance with legislative requirements and the Ministerial Guidelines.

Data relating to hardship applications, payment plans, deferrals, waivers, recovery action and outcomes will be reviewed periodically to identify trends, emerging risks and opportunities for improvement.

Any consideration of escalation to court proceedings or land sale under section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989* will be based on an individual assessment of the ratepayer's circumstances and will only occur after all reasonable engagement, hardship and support pathways have been exhausted. Escalation will not be based solely on the age or value of the outstanding rates and charges.

This Policy will be formally reviewed at least every three years, or earlier where required by legislative change, audit findings, Ombudsman recommendations or material risk. Any amendments will be approved in accordance with Council's governance framework.

7. Definitions

This section sets out definitions for technical terms and other key terms referred to in the policy that are not in common use.

Term	Definition
Council	Merri-bek City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>
Financial Hardship	Financial hardship exists where a ratepayer does not have the financial capacity to pay their rates or charges and doing so would prevent them from affording the basic necessities of life for themselves or their dependants, in accordance with the Ministerial Guidelines and sections 171 and 171A of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> .
Hardship	Hardship exists where a ratepayer is experiencing difficulty paying their rates or charges in their current circumstances, but payment would not necessarily prevent them from affording the basic necessities of life.
Place-based approach	A place-based approach is a framework that requires Council to respond to hardship and financial hardship in a way that reflects the specific characteristics, needs and challenges of its local community.
Ratepayer	Is the occupier of any rateable property who is liable to pay residential, commercial or industrial rates. This maybe the property owner or a tenant who under the lease agreement is liable to pay rates.
Specific Regulation	A regulation set out in the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> , <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> , the <i>Magistrates Court Act 1989</i> or the <i>Infringements Act 2006</i>

8. Associated Documents

- S.7 Instrument of sub delegation CEO to Council Staff

9. References

- Victorian Ombudsman Report: Investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship. Date posted: 5 May 2021
- Introduction of Local Government Legislation amendment (Rating and other matters) Bill 2022
- Ministerial Guidelines for Council Relating to Payment of Rates and Charges December 2025

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10. Appendix 1 – Formal Debt Recovery Process

Where formal recovery is required, the following process will apply:

- Accounts may be referred to Council's debt recovery agency only where all reasonable engagement and support options have been exhausted, and where no payment, response, payment plan, deferral or hardship application is in place or under assessment.
- Before any referral occurs, Council must have made reasonable attempts to contact the ratepayer and advised them in writing of the outstanding rates or charges and the available options, including payment plans, deferrals and hardship assistance.
- Once referred, the debt recovery agency will contact the ratepayer on Council's behalf, confirm that they are acting under Council's instruction, and provide details of the outstanding amount and the available options to resolve the account.
- Where no communication, payment or acceptable plan is received, a final demand may be issued on Council's behalf advising that failure to respond may result in further recovery action in accordance with legislation.
- A Council officer may authorise the debt recovery agency to take further steps to recover unpaid rates and charges, including legal proceedings, where all hardship and engagement pathways have been exhausted and it is appropriate to do so.
- Unless an acceptable payment plan or hardship plan is entered into, payment in full, including any lawful recovery costs, may be required before recovery action is withdrawn.
- Accounts referred to the debt recovery agency may remain under their management and be updated from time to time with outstanding rates, charges and applicable interest until the balance is paid in full or otherwise resolved.
- Any escalation to court proceedings or consideration of land sale under section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989* must also comply with the escalation safeguards set out in the Monitoring, Evaluating and Review section of this Policy.

7.8 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 APRIL 2026

Acting Director Business Transformation, Yvonne Callanan
Financial Services

Officer Recommendation

That Council notes the Financial Management Report for the period ending 30 April 2026 included as Attachment 1 to this report.

REPORT

Executive Summary

This report presents the Financial Management Report for the financial year to date period ending 30 April 2026. A detailed financial review was undertaken across the organisation at the end of February 2026. The results of this review are included in this report as the Annual Forecast.

For the ten months ended 30 April 2026 an operating surplus of \$57.8 million was achieved, which is \$0.3 million (0%) lower than the year-to-date (YTD) budget of \$58.0 million. As set out in the issues section of this report, operating surplus funds do not convert to immediately available cash to Council. The accounting surplus includes items such as non-cash contributions, capital grants and is used to fund items such as loan repayments, the rates funded capital works program and transfers (savings) via reserves.

Council has spent \$43.6 million on capital expenditure, which is tracking below the YTD budget of \$65.1 million. After the detailed review of the program undertaken at the end of February, a total program of \$68.9 million is forecast, with \$25.3 million remaining.

Previous Council Decisions

2025-26 Third Quarter Financial Report – 8 April 2026

That Council:

1. *Notes the 2025-26 Third Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 28 February 2026, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.*
2. *Notes the status of the capital works program for 2025-26.*
3. *Notes the full-year forecast for operating income of \$285.0 million, operating expenditure of \$250.5 million and an accounting surplus of \$34.5 million arising from the Third Quarter Financial Review.*
4. *Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of \$68.9 million, arising from the 2025-26 Third Quarter Financial Review.*
5. *Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2026-27 Capital Works Program (\$11.7 million):*
 - a) *Fully or partially grant (or external) funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:*
 - *Oak Park Sports and Aquatic – Electrification - \$1,293,194*
 - *Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade – Wheatsheaf Rd - \$917,861*
 - *Mitchell Parade Retaining Wall - \$828,947*
 - *Kendall/Harding Footbridge over Merri Creek - \$780,000*
 - b) *Reserve funded projects:*
 - *Balam Balam Place North West Building – Phoenix Street - \$289,118*
 - *Park Renewal, Volga Street/Middle Street (Design) - \$100,000*

- *Park Renewal, Calder Reserve (Design and Construct) - \$52,700*
 - *Park Renewal, Gordon St – Minor Works - \$50,000*
 - *Coburg Library and Piazza Redevelopment - \$40,000*
- c) *Rates funded projects:*
- *Dunstan Reserve Childcare - \$1,600,000*
 - *Heavy Vehicles Replacement Program - \$1,270,000*
 - *Wheeler Street - Retaining Wall - \$915,000*
 - *Road Reconstruction, OHea Street from Lonsdale St to Clifton Grove - \$700,000*
 - *Light Vehicles Replacement Program - \$666,603*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Crowley to Rhodes - \$600,000*
 - *Drainage, Moama Crescent and Jhonson Street - Hot Spot No 21 - \$266,650*
 - *Electricity Capacity Upgrades at Hadfield Depot - \$200,000*
 - *McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) - Social Room Amenities & Kitchen - \$200,000*
 - *Footpath & Bike path Renewals - \$200,000*
 - *Wombat Crossing - West Street - \$200,000*
 - *Merri Trail - Flood Mitigation - Bridge to Darebin - \$150,000*
 - *Holbrook Reserve Pavilion and Gender Inclusive Change Rooms - \$139,538*
 - *Glenroy Movement and Place Plan - \$80,000*
 - *McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) - Pavillion Gender Inclusive Facilities - \$50,000*
 - *Corporate Carbon Reduction - \$50,000*
 - *Sylvester St Oak Park Land Slide - \$47,291*
 - *Balfe Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$30,000*
 - *DeChene Reserve – Gender Inclusive Facilities - \$28,460*
6. *Approves funding for the following new projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$0.8 million):*
- *Merri Creek Trail Realignment – Bowden Reserve - \$300,000*
 - *Oak Park Pool – Blanket Replacement - \$180,000*
 - *Stormwater Rectification - \$110,000*
 - *Coburg Leisure Centre – Locker Replacement - \$70,000*
 - *Council Chambers Artwork Restoration - \$50,000*
 - *ATC Cook Reserve – Off-street Carpark - \$25,000*
 - *Body Worn Cameras & Radios - \$23,039*
7. *Approves additional funding for the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$1.4 million):*
- *Allard Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$329,459*
 - *Forward Road Design - \$224,645*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Devon Street from View to Oak - \$221,493*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Jersey St from Ohea to Gaffney – Both Carriageways - \$89,000*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Fowler Street from Walsh to Dead End - \$70,274*
 - *Road Safety and Amenity Improvements Program - \$64,000*
 - *Minor Park – Tate Reserve (Removal) - \$50,903*
 - *Brunswick Early Years Hub - \$50,691*
 - *York Street Park Close to Home - \$43,387*
 - *Business Transformation – mobile phone purchases - \$41,625*
 - *Edgars Creek Corridor Connection Project - \$32,034*

- Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades - \$31,500
 - Shore Reserve – Football & Cricket - \$30,000
 - Victoria Street Brunswick West MCHC - \$27,979
 - City Infrastructure – mobile phone purchases - \$20,317
 - Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment - \$18,681
 - Municipal Art Collection - \$18,000
 - Glenroy College – Open Space - \$10,000
 - Gowanbrae Dog Park - \$9,624
 - Road Reconstruction, Herbert Street from Pascoe Vale to Dead End - \$5,599
 - Community – mobile phone purchases - \$4,679
 - Place & Environment – mobile phone purchases - \$2,772
 - Public Art Program Across Merri-bek - \$1,369
 - Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal - \$783
 - Fawkner Transport Study Projects - \$5,763
8. Notes savings realised from the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$ 1.7 million):
- Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Arndt to Crowley - \$757,571
 - Road Reconstruction, Grandview Ave from Brearley to Princes - \$231,657
 - Road Reconstruction, Baxter Street from Sydney Kerb Line to Railway Kerb Line - \$197,576
 - Alva Gr from Urquhart to Bell, Road Reconstruction - \$189,683
 - Merri Trail - Flood Mitigation - Bridge to Darebin 1 - \$100,000
 - Kent Road - Separated Bike Lane Trial - \$87,585
 - Hosken Reserve Stage 3 Football Pitches - \$66,181
 - De Carle Street from Donald to Davies Road Reconstruction - \$53,108
 - Balfe Park Sports Field Lights - \$44,550
 - Batman Avenue Shared Path - Upfield Shared Path - \$305

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2025-26 Second Quarter Financial Report – 11 February 2026

That Council:

1. Notes the 2025-26 Second Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 31 December 2025, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.
2. Notes the status of the capital works program for 2025-26.
3. Notes the full-year forecast for operating income of \$286.9 million, operating expenditure of \$249.8 million and an accounting surplus of \$37.0 million arising from the Second Quarter Financial Review.
4. Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of \$80.1 million, arising from the 2025-26 Second Quarter Financial Review.
5. Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2026-27 Capital Works Program (\$20.8 million):
 - a) Fully or partially grant (or external) funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:
 - Fawkner Netball Club Roof – \$4,483,220
 - Kendall/Harding Footbridge over Merri Creek – \$2,000,000
 - Victoria St - Streets for People – \$2,000,000
 - Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades – \$813,421
 - 40 km/h Rollout - Traffic Calming – \$400,000
 - Sportsfield Lighting - Dunstan Reserve (N&S) – \$400,000
 - Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment – \$64,338

- b) *Reserve funded projects:*
- *Park Renewal, Loyola Ave Pitt St (Design, Construct and Road Closure – \$300,000*
 - *Park Renewal, Calder Reserve (Design and Construct) – \$282,600*
 - *Parks and Reserve Flooding Rectification – \$200,000*
 - *Central Coburg Roads and Drainage – \$150,000*
- c) *Rates funded projects:*
- *McDonald Reserve Hockey Pitch - \$3,422,218*
 - *Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade - Wheatsheaf Rd – \$1,351,912*
 - *Heavy Vehicles Replacement Program – \$1,000,000*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Arndt to Crowley – \$800,000*
 - *West Street Neighbourhood Streetscape – \$721,000*
 - *DeChene Reserve - Gender Inclusive Facilities – \$702,775*
 - *Sylvester St Oak Park Land Slide – \$550,000*
 - *O'Hea St Bike Path Extension - Sussex to Derby St – \$400,000*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Tinning Street from Walter to Patterson – \$300,000*
 - *Fawkner Transport Study Projects- \$236,486*
 - *Hadfield Depot Masterplan Development & Drainage - \$200,000*
 - *Coburg Town Hall Upgrade – \$80,000*
 - *Carelink Go+ Device Purchases – \$59,584*
 - *Accommodation Changes to Meet Service Demand – \$50,000*
 - *Fawkner Library Upgrade Works - \$50,000*
 - *Balfe Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$20,000*
 - *Holbrook Reserve Pavilion and Gender Inclusive Change Rooms - \$10,000*
- d) *Adjustment to rates funded projects previously approved*
- *Coburg Outdoor Pool - 8 X 15 Toddlers Pool – (\$175,000)*
6. *Approves funding for the following new projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$1.2 million):*
- *Wheeler Street – Retaining Wall - \$920,000*
 - *Brunswick Baths Changeroom Works - \$175,905*
 - *Union Street – Sinkhole/Cavity Remediation Works - \$100,510*
 - *Raeburn Lighting Pole Rectification - \$36,000*
7. *Approves additional funding for the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$1.5 million):*
- *Park Renewal – Sewell Reserve - \$278,852*
 - *Reactive Drainage Program - \$266,570*
 - *Wombat Crossings – Barrow St & Blair St, Coburg - \$200,000*
 - *Light Plant and Equipment Replacement Program - \$200,000*
 - *Brunswick City Baths Repainting & Renewal - \$160,000*
 - *Raised Intersection – Landells Rd & Essex St, Pascoe Vale - \$116,000*
 - *Narre Narre Stadium Floor Renewal - \$109,264*
 - *115 Nicholson Street Footpath Upgrade - \$60,000*
 - *Gowanbrae Dog Park - \$19,051*
 - *Municipal Art Collection - \$13,115*
 - *Edgars Creek Corridor Connection Project - \$6,617*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Herbert Street from Pascoe Vale to Dead End - \$6,356*
 - *Road Reconstruction, Fowler Street from Walsh to Dead End - \$4,817*
 - *Brunswick Early Years Hub - \$4,500*
 - *Pedestrian Access & Priority Treatments - \$4,024*
 - *Public Art Program Across Merri-bek - \$1,385*

- Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal - \$1,182
 - Park Renewal – Soudan St - \$312
8. Notes savings realised from the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program (\$ 4.5 million):
- Drainage, Union St from Millward St to Brunswick Rd - \$1,450,000
 - Road Reconstruction, Northumberland Rd from Fawkner to Longview - \$353,393
 - Brunswick Activity Centre Upgrade Works – Wilson Ave - \$350,061
 - Road Reconstruction, Jersey St from Ohea to Gaffney – Both Carriageways - \$306,920
 - Sim Cr & Victoria St – Engeny Hot Spot No 8 - \$212,027
 - Road Reconstruction, Tinning Street from Patterson to Garnet - \$202,044
 - Light Vehicles Replacement Program - \$200,000
 - School Active Travel and Safety Infrastructure - \$200,000
 - Jukes Rd & William St, Fawkner – Priority Crossing - \$150,000
 - Climate Vulnerability Implementation – Buildings - \$120,000
 - Brunswick Baths – Modifications for Improvements to AV, IT & Lighting Systems - \$120,000
 - Raeburn Reserve – Cricket Training Nets - \$114,013
 - Parker Reserve – Baseball – Change Room & Refurbishment - \$109,264
 - Rehabilitation, Moonee Pde from Jewel to Union - \$100,000
 - Bain Avenue from Plaisted to Boundary, Road Reconstruction - \$97,746
 - Balfe Parks Sports Field Lights - \$83,113
 - Fawkner Transport Study Projects - \$64,000
 - Footpath & Bikepath Renewals - \$60,000
 - Road Safety and Amenity Improvements Program - \$52,000
 - Large Scale WSUD (Sportsfield Stormwater Reuse) - \$43,799
 - Brunswick City Baths Community Meeting Space - \$40,000
 - Park Renewal – Esslemont Reserve - \$30,000
 - Additional Seating on Walking Routes to Shops - \$2,250

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2025-26 First Quarter Financial Report – 12 November 2025

That Council:

1. Notes the 2025-26 First Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 30 September 2025, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.
2. Notes the status of the capital works program for 2025-26.
3. Notes the increase to the full-year forecast for operating income of \$9.2 million and the increase to operating expenditure of \$6.0 million arising from the 2025-26 First Quarter Financial Review.
4. Approves a decrease of \$2.7 million to the transfer to the Significant Projects Reserve (to \$1.8 million) in 2025-26 to fund additional expenditure relating to the Elevate Transformation Program and the bring forward of the Coburg basketball feasibility study. This reduction will be offset by a corresponding increase to the reserve in the 2026-2030 budget.
5. Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of \$102.9 million, arising from the 2025-26 First Quarter Financial Review.
6. Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2026-27 Capital Works Program:
 - a) Fully or partially grant funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:
 - AG Gillon Stormwater Harvesting - \$1,000,000

- Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment - \$611,324.
- b) Rates funded projects:
- Bin Purchases (waste charge funded) - \$2,258,519
 - West Street Neighbourhood Streetscape - \$1,000,000
 - DeChene Reserve - Gender Inclusive Facilities - \$700,421
 - Coburg Outdoor Pool - 8 X 15 Toddlers Pool - \$175,000
 - Fawkner Library Upgrade Works - \$70,000.
7. Brings forward the following capital project funding to the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:
- Brunswick Early Years Hub (grant funded) - \$261,663
 - Coburg Olympic Pool - Repainting - \$135,000
 - Balfe Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - \$50,000.
8. Approves funding for the following new projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:
- Fawkner Netball Club Roof (grant funded) - \$4,560,000
 - Jukes Rd & William St, Fawkner - Priority Crossing (grant funded) - \$437,000
 - Blackspot Project - Intersection of Widford St & View St, Glenroy (grant funded) - \$263,900
 - Raised Crossing - Everett St & Moreland Rd (SLRSP) (grant funded) - \$184,000
 - Electric Vehicle Chargers (externally funded) - \$170,000 (previously budgeted as operating)
 - Emergency Road Works - Ivy St, Brunswick - \$104,010
 - Blackspot Project - Intersection of Albert St & Wilkinson St, Brunswick (grant funded) - \$57,330
 - Brunswick Bowls Club - \$16,646
 - Albion St/Lillian St Rectification - \$15,000
 - Glenroy Community Hub - Electrical Works - \$10,815
 - Coburg Lake Bridge Rectification Works - \$10,620.
9. Approves additional funding for the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:
- Mitchell Parade Retaining Wall (grant funded) - \$1,068,852
 - Drainage, Moama Crescent and Jhonson Street - Hot Spot No 21 - \$381,650
 - Victoria St - Streets for People (grant funded) - \$374,000
 - York Street Park Close to Home (reserve funded) - \$265,374
 - Rehabilitation, Moonee Pde from Jewel to Union - \$245,000
 - Wombat Crossings - Barrow St & Blair St, Coburg - \$200,000
 - Brunswick City Baths Repainting & Renewal - \$174,345
 - Road Reconstruction, Katawa Grove from Cooraminta to Dead End - \$168,000
 - 40 km/h Rollout - Traffic Calming - \$100,000
 - South Street - Engeny Hot Spot No 12 - \$99,404
 - Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal - \$85,485
 - South Street from Jensen to West, Road Reconstruction - \$82,866
 - Fawkner Leisure Centre Redevelopment - \$55,195
 - South Street from Dickinson to Everitt, Road Reconstruction - \$51,421
 - Park Renewal - Soudan St (reserve funded) - \$48,599
 - Building Maintenance - Capital Purchases - \$28,138
 - Fallon St From Union to Collier Both Carriageways - \$16,889
 - Park Renewal - Beccles / Oulton Reserve (reserve funded) - \$12,974
 - Tyson Street from Jukes Rd to Denys Street, Road Reconstruction - \$12,028
 - Mobile Phone Purchases - \$15,408
 - Shade Sail Installation - Anne Sgro Child Care (grant funded) - \$6,302.

10. *Notes savings realised from the following existing projects in the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:*

- *Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Lonsdale St to Clifton Grove - \$548,786*
- *Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Montefiore St to Lonsdale St - \$425,878*
- *Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Sussex St to Bishop St - \$356,397*
- *Road Reconstruction, O’Hea Street from Bishop St to Montefiore St - \$350,514*
- *Road Reconstruction, Dalgety Street from Hope to Whitby - \$325,000*
- *Road Reconstruction, Devon Street from View to Oak - \$300,000*
- *Park Renewal, Cox Reserve, including playground upgrade (reserve funded) - \$227,239*
- *School Active Travel and Safety Infrastructure - \$200,000*
- *Road Reconstruction, Garden Street from Belfast to Glenlyon (both Carriageways) - \$165,237*
- *Road Safety and Amenity Improvements Program - \$143,000*
- *Wombat Crossing - Albion to Melville - \$115,000*
- *Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades - \$95,755*
- *Patterson Street from Tinning to Albion, Road Reconstruction - \$26,760*
- *Parker Reserve - Baseball - Change Room & Refurbishment - \$25,000*
- *Snell Gve-Public Toilet-Snell Gve, Oak Park - \$15,859*
- *Fawkner Community Hall - CB Smith Reserve - \$7,000.*

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2024-25 Financial Statements and Performance Statements – 10 September 2025

That Council, in accordance with the recommendations of the Audit and Risk Committee, and having considered Council’s Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 Statements at Attachments 1 and 2 to this report:

1. *Approves ‘in principle’ the Financial and Performance Statements 2024-25.*
2. *Authorises the Mayor, Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor, Cr Helen Politis, and the Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson, to certify the Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 in their final form.*
3. *Carries forward the \$473,339 of tied operating funding that were not spent as of 30 June 2025.*
4. *Carries forward the \$32,410,329 of capital project funds into the 2025/26 Capital Works Program.*
5. *Authorises the Principal Accounting Officer to implement any minor administrative changes to the Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 if recommended by the Auditor-General upon final review, for approval by the Chief Executive Officer.*

1. Policy Context

The 2025-2029 Budget was adopted by Council on 23 June 2025. The Budget sets out the resources required to deliver the Council Plan, Services and Capital Works Program for the 2025-26 financial year.

This report supports Council’s continuing commitment to open and accountable management of the financial resources of Merri-bek on behalf of its ratepayers.

Under s181G of the *Local Government Act 1989*, the CEO is required to prepare a statement under section 138 which includes the below details records of each environmental upgrade agreements.

2. Background

The Financial Management Report at Attachment 1 provides Council's financial statements for the year to date (YTD) period ended 30 April 2026. The actual results are compared to the budget in all parts of the report.

3. Issues

Operating Performance Summary

Year to Date Result

For the ten months ended 30 April 2026, an operating surplus \$57.8 million was recorded, which is \$0.3 million (1%) less than the year to date (YTD) budget of \$58.0 million. This comprises total revenue of \$263.3 million which is \$8.4 million (3%) more than the YTD budget of \$254.9 million and total expenditure of \$205.5 million which is \$8.6 million (4%) more than the YTD budget of \$196.9 million.

Further details on the year-to-date result are included in **Attachment 1**.

Forecast Year End Result (Q3 result)

Council adopted the 2025-26 budget projecting an accounting surplus of \$43.3 million in June 2025, which has now been revised to \$34.5 million following the Q3 review.

Although the annual forecast result remains an underlying surplus (underlying result), the lower surplus compared to budget indicates a decline in the operating position. While the underlying result has declined, the unrestricted result is forecasting a smaller decline to budget due to of savings from rates funded capital projects.

Further details of the annual forecast (including Q1, Q2 and Q3) are included in **Attachment 1**.

Capital Performance Summary

Year to Date Result

Council has spent \$43.6 million on capital expenditure YTD which is \$21.5 million (33%) lower than YTD budget of \$65.1 million. After the detailed review of the program undertaken at the end of February, a total program of \$68.9 million is forecast, with \$25.3 million remaining.

Forecast Year End Result

Following the Q3 review the program is forecast to decrease by \$25.0 million from the adopted budget. This consists of additional carry forwards from 2024-25 of \$8.4 million, 85 projects requiring additional or new funding of \$14.7 million, 6 projects with \$0.6 million brought forward from future years, \$38.3 million due to 26-27 carry forwards and project savings of \$10.4 million.

Financial Position Summary

Year to Date Result

Council is still showing a strong balance sheet position, with YTD cash assets at \$95.1 million. This is a \$1.1 million decrease on 30 June 2025 cash levels. Cash fluctuates frequently over the year due to a number of factors. This decrease is affected by the timing of rates instalments as well as lower than anticipated delivery of Capital Works program.

Forecast Year End Result (Q3 result)

The forecast financial position for 30 June 2026 is a cash and investment position of \$91.7 million (an increase of \$18.5 million compared to budget) and net current assets of \$81.3 million (an increase of \$18.3 million compared to budget). These increases are primarily due to the increase in cash resulting from the forecast decrease in rates funded capital works of \$8.6 million in 2025-26.

Environmental Upgrade Agreements

Environmental Upgrade Agreements are contracts that Council has entered into with local businesses to fund and install sustainability upgrades to non-residential buildings upfront, with businesses repaying Council quarterly over a ten-year term.

A quarterly report from the CEO is required providing specific details. These are listed in the table alongside a status report for the quarter.

Reporting requirement of <i>Local Government Act 1989</i>		Status report for 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026 quarter at Merri-bek
a	Environmental upgrade agreements entered into in the last quarter	No new Environmental Upgrade Agreements were approved in the quarter
b	The value of each environmental upgrade charge approved for those agreements	The table below contains details of the value of each environmental upgrade charge
c	The total number of environmental upgrade charges in operation in the last quarter	There are currently three agreements in operation, listed in the table below.
d	The total value of environmental upgrade charge payments that have fallen due and remain unpaid	No payments are due that remain unpaid
e	The total value of environmental upgrade charge payments that have not yet fallen due	The total value of Environmental Upgrade Agreement payments that have not yet fallen due is \$122,540

Address	Agreement total value	Expiry	Remaining balance
1 Cross Street, Brunswick East 3057	50,296.68	30/09/2027	6,224
96 Bakers Road, Coburg North 3058	163,295.48	30/11/2028	40,191
47-97 Glenroy Road, Glenroy	188,866.00	30/11/2029	70,825
Total	402,458.16		117,240

Key Definitions

Surplus – is reported based on the Australian Accounting Standards and includes all operating income and expenditure recognised in the financial period, including gifted subdivisional assets (non-monetary), developer contributions and grants towards capital works projects. It is important to note that the surplus is not a cash surplus. It does not convert to immediately available cash for Council. Significant amounts of the surplus are restricted by legislation and must be used for future infrastructure investment.

Adjusted underlying surplus – is the surplus for the year adjusted for non-recurrent capital grants and contributions. It is an accepted measure of financial sustainability as it is not impacted by non-recurring or once-off items of revenue and expenses that can often mask the operating results.

Unrestricted result – this is the net funding result after considering the funding requirements to meet loan principal repayments and transfers to and from reserves.

Solvency Assessment

Council officers have reviewed Council's liquidity (Current Assets divided by Current Liabilities), and the revised forecast is 2.3. The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) recommends that this ratio be 1.5 or higher. This is a positive result and shows that Council is solvent.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. There are no Human Rights impacts.

4. Community Consultation and Engagement

Community consultation and engagement was not required for this report as it reflects the performance against the budget and delivery of the capital works program.

Affected persons rights and interests

Before making a decision that affects a person's rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views. There are no individual rights or interests affected.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

The overall corporate objective is to deliver the 2025-26 budget with the best possible outcome for Council and the community, and in line with the approved revised forecast targets.

7. Implementation

The financial position of Council and the progress of the capital works program will continue to be monitored and managed.

Attachment/s

- [1](#) Council Monthly Financial Management Report - April 2026 D26/223577



Council Monthly Financial Management Report

10 Months Ended April 2026

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Executive Summary

Operating Performance

For the ten months ended 30 April 2026, Council recorded an operating surplus of \$57.8 million which is \$0.3 million (0%) less than the year to date (YTD) budget of \$58.0 million. This comprises total revenue of \$263.3 million which is \$8.4 million (3%) more than the YTD budget of \$254.9 million and total expenditure of \$205.5 million which is \$8.6 million (4%) unfavourable compared to the YTD budget of \$196.9 million.

Income Statement	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	YTD Variance %	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Total Revenue	263,320	254,946	8,374	3%	281,292	285,010	3,719
Total Expenses	205,542	196,911	(8,630)	(4%)	237,964	250,533	(12,570)
Surplus/(Deficit)	57,779	58,035	(257)	(0%)	43,328	34,477	(8,851)

Adopted budget - YTD favourable variance in revenue is primarily driven by Grants - Capital (\$4.1 million), greater than anticipated supplementary rating revenue (\$0.9 million) and greater than anticipated interest on rates (\$0.8 million). YTD unfavourable variance in expenses is due to Net Loss on Disposal of Assets which generate nil proceeds like footpaths, roads, kerb & channel (\$4.3 million), employee leave provisions (\$2.4 million) and software maintenance (\$1.9 million).

Annual Forecast - The Q3 financial review is projecting a surplus of \$34.5 million, which is an unfavourable movement of \$8.9 million from adopted budget. The Q3 financial review also forecasts an adjusted underlying surplus of \$18.2 million which is \$3.9 million less than adopted budget.

Capital Works Program

YTD - Council has spent \$43.6 million on capital expenditure to 30 April 2026, which is \$21.5 million (33%) less than YTD adopted budget, with \$50.3 million (53.5%) of the full year budget remaining. The variance is driven by underspends in Recreational, Leisure & Community Facilities projects (\$6.9 million), Roads projects (\$6.3 million), Plant, Machinery & Equipment (\$1.9 million), Building Improvements projects (\$1.8 million), Parks, Open Space & Streetscapes projects (\$1.4 million), Buildings projects (\$1.4 million), and Drainage projects (\$1.0 million). There will be ongoing underspends to the adopted budget.

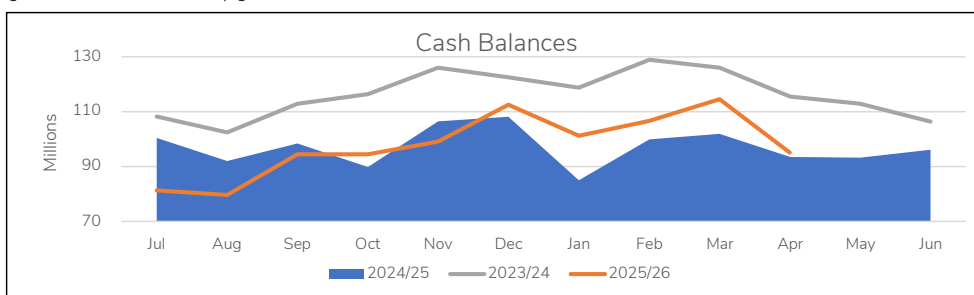
Annual Forecast - The capital works program is forecast to decrease by \$25.0 million from the adopted budget of \$93.9 million as a result of additional carry forwards from 2024-25 of \$8.4 million, 85 projects requiring additional or new funding of \$14.7 million, 6 projects with \$0.6 million brought forward from future years, \$38.3 million due to 26-27 carry forwards and project savings of \$10.4 million.

Financial Results Summary	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	YTD Variance %	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
New asset expenditure	4,636	6,311	1,674	27%	12,345	8,479	3,867
Asset renewal expenditure	28,208	43,532	15,324	35%	60,648	43,088	17,560
Asset upgrade expenditure	10,773	15,262	4,489	29%	20,894	17,315	3,580
Total capital works expenditure	43,617	65,105	21,488	33%	93,887	68,881	25,006

Cash & Investments

Cash assets are \$95.1 million as at 30 April 2026. This is a decrease of \$1.1 million on 30 June 2025 cash levels, mainly as a result of due to the timing of when rates instalments fall due. Cash fluctuates frequently over the year due to a number of factors, mainly due to the timing of when the rates instalments fall due and the delivery of Capital Works projects.

Of the \$95.1 million cash assets, \$75.1 million is convertible to cash in less than 60 days and \$72.0 million (100%) is held in green investments. The portfolio is in compliance with Council policy which requires at least \$20.0 million to be convertible to cash and green investments to make up greater than 70% of all investments.



Operating Performance

Income Statement

YTD Variance (\$)		YTD Variance (%)	
▲	> \$500k	▲	> 10%
■	< \$500k & > (\$500k)	■	< 10% & > (10%)
▼	< (\$500k)	▼	< (10%)

Income Statement	Notes	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	YTD Variance %	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Revenue								
Rates and charges	1	204,841	202,650	▲ 2,191	1%	202,778	204,529	▲ 1,750
Statutory fees and fines	2	16,685	16,145	▲ 540	3%	19,323	19,886	▲ 563
User Fees	3	8,262	7,574	▲ 688	9%	8,899	9,637	▲ 738
Contributions - Monetary	4	6,225	7,072	▼ (847)	(12%)	8,232	8,700	▲ 467
Grants - Operating	5	15,553	15,181	▲ 371	2%	21,205	21,741	▲ 536
Grants - Capital	6	4,083	-	▲ 4,083	100%	12,964	11,525	▼ (1,439)
Other Revenue	7	7,646	6,298	▲ 1,348	21%	7,797	8,901	▲ 1,103
Asset Sales		26	26	0	0%	92	92	0
Total Revenue		263,320	254,946	▲ 8,374	3%	281,292	285,010	▲ 3,719
Expenses								
Employee Benefits	8	100,951	96,994	▼ (3,956)	(4%)	116,144	118,949	▼ (2,805)
Contracts, Materials & Services	9	61,556	59,344	▼ (2,213)	(4%)	73,199	80,439	▼ (7,240)
Depreciation	10	34,289	36,350	▲ 2,062	6%	43,621	41,767	▲ 1,854
Amortisation		296	293	▲ (3)	(1%)	236	352	▲ (116)
Bad and doubtful debts		2,880	2,641	▲ (239)	(9%)	3,153	3,476	▲ (323)
Net loss on disposal of assets	11	4,321	-	▼ (4,321)	(100%)	-	3,994	▼ (3,994)
Finance Costs		673	675	▲ 1	0%	820	824	▲ (4)
Other Expenses		575	614	▲ 39	6%	790	733	▲ 57
Total Expenses		205,542	196,911	▼ (8,630)	(4%)	237,965	250,533	▼ (12,570)
Net Result		57,779	58,035	▲ (257)	(0%)	43,329	34,477	▼ (8,851)

Year to Date Result

Revenue

4. **Contributions - Monetary** ended \$0.8 million (12%) unfavourable due to lower than anticipated subdivider contributions (\$1.2 million). This unfavourable variance is offset by the recognition of contribution relating to Kendall/Harding Footbridge (\$0.1 million).

6. **Grants - Capital** ended \$4.1 million (100%) favourable due to recognition of funding for a variety of different capital projects phased for June 2026.

7. **Other Revenue** ended \$1.3 million (21%) favourable due to receiving a greater return on investments than anticipated (\$0.8 million) and recognition of contribution relating to Kendall/Harding Footbridge (\$0.1 million).

Expenses

11. **Net loss on disposal of assets** ended \$4.3 million (100%) unfavourable due to disposal of assets which generate nil proceeds like footpaths, roads, kerb & channel.

Forecast Year End Result

Revenue

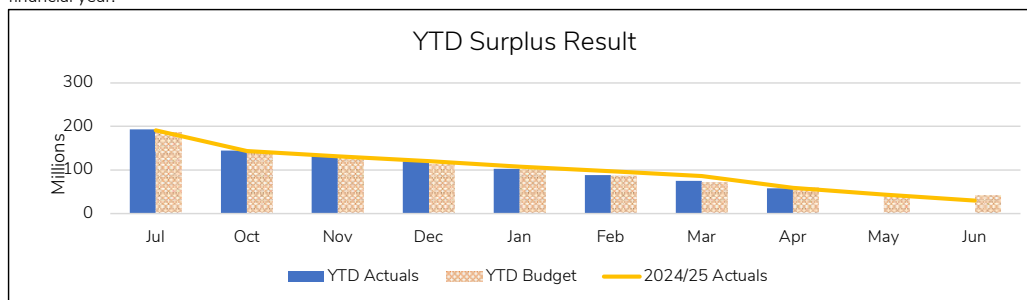
- 1. **Rates and Charges** are forecast to increase by \$1.8 million due to greater than anticipated supplementary rating revenue (\$0.8 million) and greater than anticipated interest on rates (\$0.6 million).
- 2. **Statutory Fees and Fines** are forecast to increase by \$0.6 million primarily due to higher than anticipated parking infringements (\$0.5 million favourable).
- 3. **User Fees** are forecast to increase by \$0.7 million primarily as a result of an increase in Meals on Wheels (MOWs) with other Councils (\$0.5 million) and also an increase in the aquatics & leisure contract (\$0.2 million).
- 5. **Grants - Operating** are forecast to increase by \$0.5 million primarily as a result of a Maternal Child Health grant (\$0.3 million) and a new Food Systems grant (\$0.2 million).
- 6. **Grants - Capital** are forecast to decrease by \$1.4 million due to a grant for AG Gillon Stormwater Harvesting being carried forward into FY26-27 (\$1.0 million) and a grant for Oak Park Sports and Aquatic - Electrification being carried forward into FY26-27 (\$0.3 million).
- 7. **Other Revenue** are forecast to increase by \$1.1 million primarily as a result of receiving a greater return on investments than anticipated (\$0.5 million).

Expenses

- 8. **Employee Benefits** are forecast to increase by \$2.8 million primarily due to an increase in leave provisions and higher than anticipated parental leave payments.
- 9. **Contracts, Materials & Services** are forecast to increase by \$7.2 million primarily due to earlier than anticipated lifecycle project expenditure for Elevate (\$2.5 million) and increased project delivery costs for Coburg Central (\$0.7 million), as well as increased service delivery costs relating to waste collection (\$0.6 million), building maintenance (\$0.5 million) and IT applications (\$0.2 million).
- 10. **Depreciation** is forecast to decrease by \$1.9 million due to delays in project completion and capitalisation.
- 11. **Net Loss on Disposal of Assets** are forecast to increase by \$4.0 million due to the process of disposal of existing assets when they are replaced with new assets.

YTD Operating Result

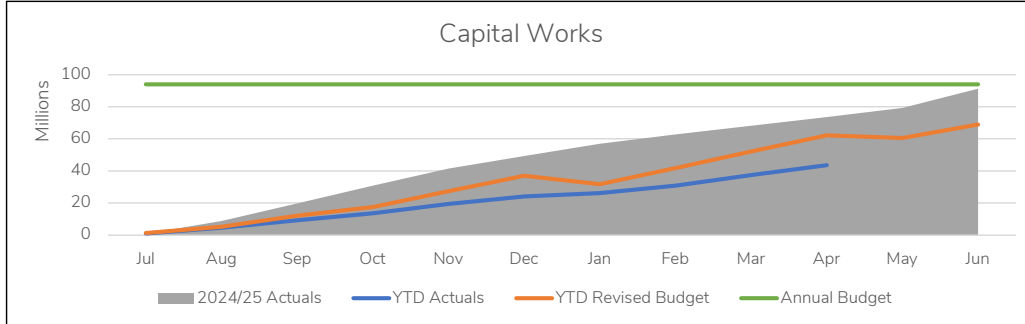
YTD surplus result is impacted by total rates being recognised in July and the surplus will reduce progressively over the course of the financial year.



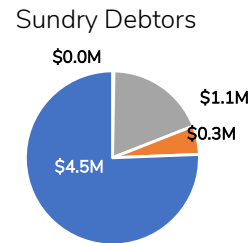
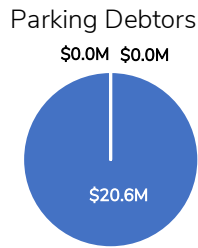
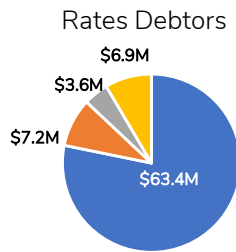
Capital Works

YTD - Council has spent \$43.6 million on capital expenditure to 30 April 2026 which is \$21.5 million (33%) lower than the YTD budget, with \$50.3 million (54%) of the full year budget remaining.

Annual Forecast - The capital works program is forecast to decrease by \$25.0 million from the adopted budget of \$93.9 million as a result of additional carry forwards from 2024-25 of \$8.4 million, 85 projects requiring additional or new funding of \$14.7 million, 6 projects with \$0.6 million brought forward from future years, \$38.3 million due to 26-27 carry forwards and project savings of \$10.4 million.



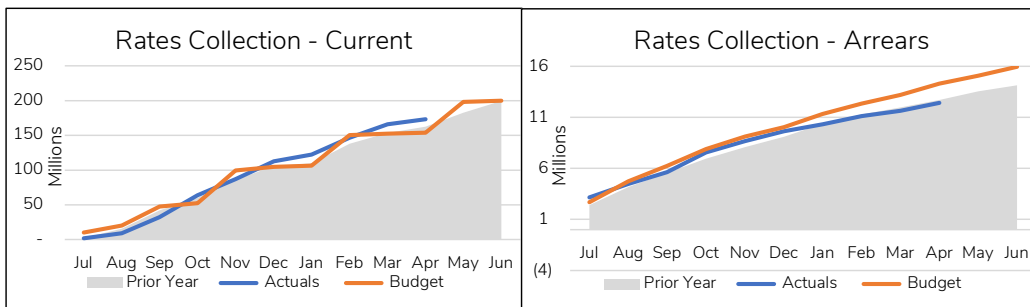
Debtors



Legend for Debtors: <1 Year (blue), 1 Year (orange), 2 Years (grey), 3+ Years (yellow), Current (yellow), 30 Days (grey), 60 Days (orange), 90+ Days (blue).

Rates Collection

Rates cash collections are on budget and will be monitored over the upcoming months for impact on the forecast cash balances.



Investments

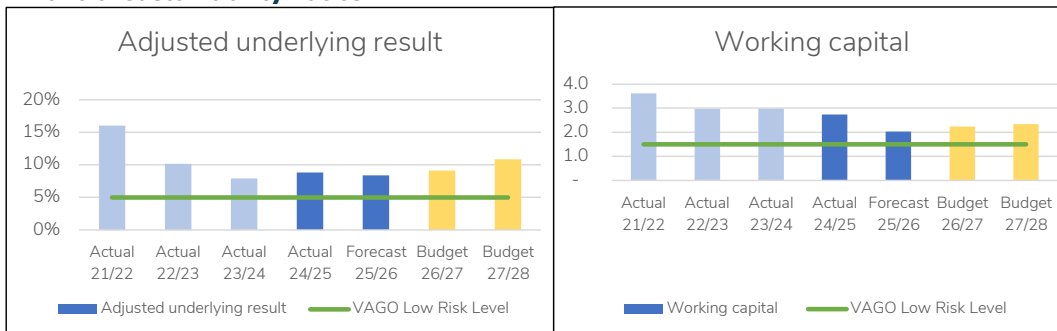
Of the \$95.1 million cash assets, \$75.1 million is convertible to cash in less than 60 days and \$72.0 million (100%) of term deposit investments are held in green investments. The portfolio is in compliance with Council policy which requires at least \$20.0 million to be convertible to cash and green investments to make up greater than 70% of all investments.

Bank	Maturity Date	Green %	Interest Rate %	S & P short term rating	Amount \$'000	Ratio %
Minor Cash*	N/A		N/A	N/A	116	
Westpac	N/A		4.20%	A-1+	12,818	
Westpac	N/A		4.30%	A-1+	10,121	
ME Bank - 2	18/05/2026	100%	4.30%	A-2	5,000	
ME Bank - 2	30/06/2026	100%	4.60%	A-2	5,000	23.6%
ME Bank - 2	18/05/2026	100%	4.30%	A-2	7,000	
Bendigo Bank - 2	23/06/2026	100%	4.65%	A-2	5,000	
Bendigo Bank - 2	20/05/2026	100%	4.25%	A-2	5,000	20.8%
Bendigo Bank - 2	8/07/2026	100%	4.65%	A-2	5,000	
Suncorp - 3	22/06/2026	100%	4.67%	A-1	10,000	13.9%
IMB - 3	27/05/2026	100%	4.40%	A-2	10,000	13.9%
Westpac - 6	9/10/2026	100%	5.13%	A-1+	4,000	
Westpac - 6	4/06/2026	100%	4.32%	A-1+	10,000	27.8%
Westpac - 6	23/06/2026	100%	4.44%	A-1+	6,000	
Total		100%			95,055	100.0%
Green					72,000	100.0%

* Minor cash includes NAB holding account and Petty Cash

Financial Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Ratios

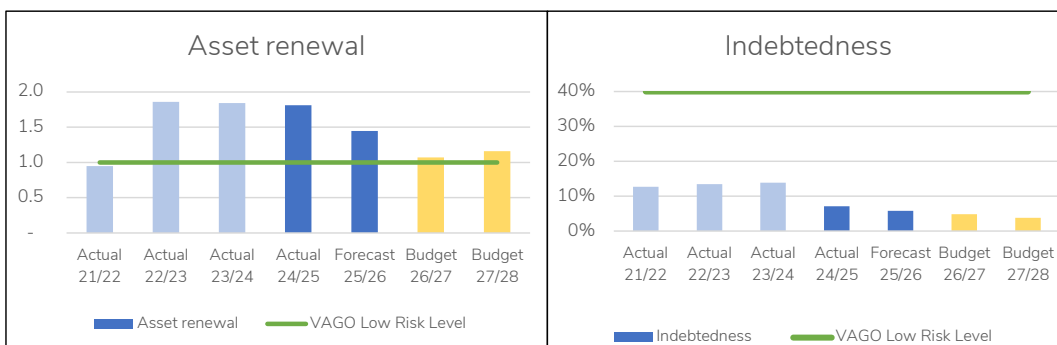


Adjusted underlying surplus (deficit) / adjusted underlying revenue

This ratio measures an entity's ability to generate its own cash. A positive result indicates a surplus, and the larger the percentage, the stronger the result. The result highlights Council's challenges in generating enough cash to fund future capital works without borrowing.

Current assets / current liabilities

Compares current assets to current liabilities, which provides a measure of the ability to pay existing liabilities in the next 12 months. This year's result expected to be in the low-risk range.



Renewal & upgrade spend/ depreciation

Ratios higher than 1.0 indicate that spending on existing assets is faster than the depreciation rate. This year's result is expected to stay in the low-risk range.

Non-current liabilities / own-source revenue

Measures Council's ability to pay the principal and interest on its borrowings as due from the funds it generates. This year's result is expected to stay in the low-risk range.

Treasury Corporation of Victoria (TCV)

TCV loan requirements		Target	Forecast
Interest Cover	EBITDA/Interest Expense	> 2	▲ 88
Interest Bearing Loans	Interest Bearing Liabilities/Own Source Revenue	< 60%	▲ 6%

TCV financing is conditional upon the Council maintaining a sustainable financial position when measured by the interest cover and interest bearing loans ratios. Forecast results indicate that the Council is meeting the minimum requirements. TCV loan requirements are well within target given limited borrowing compared to own source revenue and liability obligations.

Standard Statements

Comprehensive Income Statement

Comprehensive Income Statement	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Revenue						
Rates and charges	204,841	202,650	2,191	202,778	204,529	1,750
Statutory fees and fines	16,685	16,145	540	19,323	19,886	563
User Fees	8,262	7,574	688	8,899	9,637	738
Contributions - Monetary	6,225	7,072	(847)	8,232	8,700	467
Grants - Operating	15,553	15,181	371	21,205	21,741	536
Grants - Capital	4,083	-	4,083	12,964	11,525	(1,439)
Other Revenue	7,646	6,298	1,348	7,797	8,901	1,103
Asset Sales	26	26	0	92	92	0
Total Revenue	263,320	254,946	8,374	281,292	285,010	3,719
Expenses						
Employee Benefits	100,951	96,994	(3,956)	116,144	118,949	(2,805)
Contracts, Materials & Services	61,556	59,344	(2,213)	73,199	80,439	(7,240)
Depreciation	34,289	36,350	2,062	43,621	41,767	1,854
Amortisation	296	293	(3)	236	352	(116)
Bad and doubtful debts	2,880	2,641	(239)	3,153	3,476	(323)
Net loss on disposal of assets	4,321	-	(4,321)	-	3,994	(3,994)
Finance Costs	673	675	1	820	824	(4)
Other Expenses	575	614	39	790	733	57
Total Expenses	205,542	196,911	(8,630)	237,964	250,533	(12,570)
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	57,779	58,035	(257)	43,328	34,477	(8,851)

Underlying Result	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Surplus for the Year	57,779	58,035	(257)	43,328	34,477	(8,851)
Other Comprehensive Income						
Net asset revaluation	-	-	-	49,206	49,206	-
Total Comprehensive Result	57,779	58,035	(257)	92,534	83,683	(8,851)
Non Operating Income and Expenditure						
Net loss on disposal of assets	4,295	(26)	4,321	(92)	3,901	3,994
Contributions Capital (cash & non-monetary)	(240)	(32)	(208)	(32)	(213)	(181)
Grants - Capital	(4,083)	-	(4,083)	(12,964)	(11,525)	1,439
PRRLF Reserve	(5,754)	(5,658)	(95)	(8,200)	(8,270)	(70)
DCP Reserve	(232)	(216)	(15)	-	(216)	(216)
Net asset revaluation	-	-	-	(49,206)	(49,206)	-
Total Capital Income	(6,013)	(5,933)	(80)	(21,289)	(16,324)	4,965
Underlying Result	51,766	52,102	(336)	22,040	18,154	(3,886)
Less						
Loan Principal Repayments	1,751	1,751	-	14,212	14,209	3
Additional Rates Funded CAPEX	(9,517)	(9,517)	-	13,041	(11,420)	24,461
Transfers to Reserves - Operating	232	6,486	6,254	7,783	7,783	(0)
Transfers from Reserves - Operating	-	-	-	(13,500)	(16,640)	3,140
Carry Forwards processed into FY27	23,737	23,737	-	-	23,737	(23,737)
Total Transfers & Other	16,203	22,457	6,254	21,536	17,669	3,867
Unrestricted Surplus/(Deficit)	35,562	29,643	5,918	504	484	(19)

Statement of Financial Position

Statement of Financial Position	YTD Actuals \$'000	30/06/25 Actuals \$'000	Movement Inc/(Dec) \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Current assets						
Cash and cash equivalents	23,055	36,116	(13,061)	89	24,108	24,019
Trade and other receivables	92,516	41,679	50,837	45,793	45,891	99
Other financial assets	72,000	60,000	12,000	73,107	67,607	(5,500)
Inventories	690	690	-	659	659	-
Prepayments	3,048	3,160	(112)	2,429	2,429	-
Non-current assets classified as held for sale	25,153	22,975	2,178	-	-	-
Other assets	4,550	4,156	395	2,208	2,208	-
Total current assets	221,013	168,776	52,237	124,284	142,902	18,618
Non-current assets						
Unlisted Shares	2	2	-	2	2	-
Property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	2,814,853	2,635,161	179,692	2,983,191	2,956,045	(27,146)
Right-of-use assets	713	813	-	128	128	-
Investments	38,650	37,232	1,418	36,024	36,024	-
Total non-current assets	2,854,219	2,673,207	181,110	3,019,345	2,992,199	(27,146)
Total assets	3,075,231	2,841,983	233,347	3,143,629	3,135,101	(8,528)
Current liabilities						
Payables						
Payables	20,880	20,543	338	18,753	18,753	-
Revenue Received in Advance	3,467	2,302	1,164	6,898	6,898	-
Provisions	21,772	20,923	849	27,110	27,433	323
Interest Bearing Loans and Borrowings	14,209	14,209	-	2,172	2,172	-
Trust Funds & Deposits	1,182	5,822	(4,640)	6,384	6,384	-
Lease liabilities	32	121	(89)	-	-	-
Total current liabilities	61,542	63,920	(2,378)	61,318	61,640	323
Non-current liabilities						
Provisions	2,872	2,510	362	2,603	2,603	-
Interest-bearing liabilities	11,915	12,961	(1,046)	11,437	11,437	-
Lease liabilities	466	457	10	-	-	-
Trust Funds & Deposits	706	706	-	-	-	-
Total non-current liabilities	15,959	16,633	(675)	14,040	14,040	-
Total liabilities	77,501	80,554	(3,053)	75,358	75,681	323
Net assets	2,997,731	2,761,430	236,301	3,068,272	3,059,421	(8,851)
Equity						
Asset revaluation reserves	2,048,563	1,871,459	177,104	-	-	-
Other reserves	52,022	66,701	(14,678)	2,151,921	2,172,986	21,065
Accumulated surplus	897,145	823,270	73,875	916,351	886,435	(29,916)
Total equity	2,997,731	2,761,430	236,301	3,068,272	3,059,421	(8,851)

Statement of Cashflows

Statement of Cash Flows	YTD	Annual	Annual	Annual
	Actuals	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
	Inflows	Inflows	Inflows	Inflows
	(Outflows)	(Outflows)	(Outflows)	(Outflows)
Cash flows from operating activities				
Rates and charges	152,309	199,737	201,399	1,663
Statutory fees and fines	14,629	18,357	18,908	552
User fees	3,963	8,721	9,459	738
Grants - operating	15,553	21,205	21,741	536
Grants - capital	5,247	12,964	11,525	(1,439)
Contributions - monetary	6,228	8,232	8,700	467
Interest received	4,716	-	879	879
Trust funds and deposits taken	36,474	41,524	41,524	-
Other receipts	6,517	7,797	8,021	224
Net GST refund/(payment)	862	-	-	-
Payments to Employees	(101,708)	(113,670)	(116,475)	(2,805)
Payments to Suppliers	(67,342)	(73,167)	(80,407)	(7,240)
Trust funds and deposits repaid	(32,676)	(41,414)	(41,414)	-
Other payments	(619)	(790)	(733)	57
Net cash (used in) / provided by operating activities	44,153	89,497	83,129	(6,368)
Cash flows from investing activities				
Payments for property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	(43,157)	(93,886)	(68,880)	25,006
Proceeds from sale of property, infrastructure, plant and equipment	448	92	92	0
Payments/(Proceeds) for investments	(12,000)	4,993	4,993	-
Net cash used in investing activities	(54,709)	(88,801)	(63,795)	25,006
Cash flows from financing activities				
Finance costs	(664)	(816)	(820)	(4)
Repayment of borrowings	(1,752)	(14,212)	(14,209)	3
Interest paid - lease liability	(10)	-	-	-
Repayment of lease liabilities	(79)	(20)	(20)	-
Net cash used in financing activities	(2,505)	(15,048)	(15,049)	(1)
Net increase/(decrease) in cash held	(13,061)	(14,352)	4,285	18,638
Cash at beginning of period	36,116	14,441	36,116	21,675
Cash at end of period	23,055	89	40,402	40,313
Cash Position				
Non-restricted Cash at 1 July 2025	36,116	14,441	36,116	21,675
Other Financial Assets at 1 July 2025	60,000	78,100	60,000	(18,100)
Cash & cash equivalents at beginning of financial year	96,116	92,541	96,116	3,575
Non-restricted Cash at end of financial period	23,055	89	24,108	24,019
Other Financial Assets at end of financial period	72,000	73,107	67,607	(5,500)
Cash & cash equivalents at end of financial period	95,055	73,196	91,715	18,519

Statement of Capital Works

Statement of Capital Works	YTD Actuals \$'000	YTD Budget \$'000	YTD Variance \$'000	Annual Budget \$'000	Annual Forecast \$'000	Annual Variance \$'000
Property						
Land	18	-	(18)	-	-	-
Buildings	2,812	4,165	1,354	8,910	3,919	4,991
Building Improvements	3,389	5,199	1,809	7,535	6,966	569
Total property	6,219	9,364	3,145	16,445	10,885	5,560
Plant and equipment						
Plant, machinery and equipment	1,751	3,683	1,932	5,877	3,324	2,553
Fixtures, Fittings and Furniture	74	132	58	171	176	(4)
Computers and telecommunications	967	984	17	1,125	1,113	12
Artworks	82	47	(35)	47	131	(84)
Library books	789	925	136	1,082	1,082	0
Total plant and equipment	3,663	5,771	2,108	8,302	5,825	2,477
Infrastructure						
Roads	14,699	20,973	6,274	27,223	23,616	3,607
Bridges	197	656	458	3,334	339	2,995
Footpaths and cycleways	3,303	3,454	151	6,662	5,045	1,617
Drainage	1,175	2,157	982	2,946	1,461	1,485
Recreational, leisure & community facilities	6,172	13,103	6,932	14,025	9,972	4,053
Waste management	174	230	56	2,183	269	1,914
Parks, open space and streetscapes	8,014	9,396	1,382	12,767	11,469	1,298
Total infrastructure	33,735	49,970	16,235	69,140	52,171	16,969
Total capital works expenditure	43,617	65,105	21,488	93,887	68,881	25,006
Represented by:						
New asset expenditure	4,636	6,311	1,674	12,345	8,479	3,867
Asset renewal expenditure	28,208	43,532	15,324	60,648	43,088	17,560
Asset upgrade expenditure	10,773	15,262	4,489	20,894	17,315	3,580
Total capital works expenditure	43,617	65,105	21,488	93,887	68,881	25,006

7.9 GOVERNANCE REPORT - JUNE 2026 - CYCLICAL REPORT

Acting Director Business Transformation, Yvonne Callanan

Governance and Strategy

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the summary of minutes from Advisory Committees to Council, at Attachment 1 to this report:
 - a) Arts Advisory Committee held 19 May 2026.
2. Endorses the recommendation of the Arts Advisory Committee meeting held 19 May 2026 and in accordance with the *Art Acquisition and Collection Development Policy*, and approves the following artwork donations and purchases for the Merri-bek Art Collection:
 - a) Mai Ei, *Where is a Place for Me to Sleep in Peace*, 2021, photographic print (\$6,000)
 - b) Safa El Samad, *Textiles in Gaza*, 2025, calico and polyester thread (\$5,000)
 - c) Judy Kuo, *Labour of Love*, 2026, felt tip marker on paper (\$60)
 - d) Judy Kuo, *Create Together*, 2026, felt tip marker on paper (\$60)
 - e) Monica Oppen & Peter Lyssiotis, *War Against War/War or Peace*, 2025, digital and print book (donation from the artists)
 - f) Noel Counihan, 5 paintings, 2 drawings, 7 prints (donation from the Malcolm Macmillan Collection)
 - g) Chris Bond, *Painting after Michelle's brain surgery*, 2007, oil on linen on MDF (donation from Olivia Poloni, storage housing costs \$7,000).
3. Notes the Records of Meetings, at Attachment 2 to this report.
4. Notes responses to questions taken on notice during Public Question Time at the 11 March and 8 April 2026 Council meetings, provided as Attachment 3 to this report.
5. Adopts the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy at Attachment 4 to this report.
6. Notes the report on Tyre Dumping in response to the Notice of Motion (September 2025 resolution).

REPORT

Executive Summary

The Governance report is prepared as a monthly standing report to Council which provides a single reporting platform for a range of statutory compliance, transparency, and governance related matters.

This Governance report includes:

- A summary of the minutes of Advisory Committees and Groups.
- The Arts Advisory Committee's recommendation to purchase the artwork as listed in the officer recommendation.
- Records of Meetings, with a recommendation that Council notes the records.
- Responses to Public Question Time items taken on notice at the 11 March and 8 April 2026 Council meetings, with a recommendation that Council notes the responses.

- A recommendation to adopt the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy, as reviewed.
- A report on Tyre Dumping in response to the Notice of Motion (September 2025 resolution).

Previous Council Decisions

Notice of Motion - Councillor Attendance at ALGA Conferences – 8 October 2025

That Council:

1. *Notes in accordance with the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy an annual budget allocation for attendance at seminars, conferences and training and community events, including for attendance at the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) National General Assembly, which is an important forum for local government advocacy.*
2. *Notes the costs associated with Councillors attending ALGA multiple times in a single Council term can be significant, and that Council must balance professional development opportunities with responsible use of public funds.*
3. *Requests a report that reviews Council's Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy regarding Councillor attendance at the ALGA National General Assembly and review the process of Councillor reporting of their attendance at approved activities.*
4. *Explores options for limiting paid councillor attendance such that each Councillor may only attend one National General Assembly at Council expense per Council term.*
5. *Considers necessary exceptions, such as where a Councillor is elected to a national local government body or holds a representative role that requires ongoing attendance.*

Notice of Motion - Tyre Dumping – 10 September 2025

That Council:

1. *Writes to the Minister for Environment requesting the State:*
 - a) *bolsters Environment Protection Authority (EPA) resourcing and powers to deal with the prevalence of illegal tyre dumping; and*
 - b) *invests in Recycling Victoria programs that improve access to appropriate waste disposal and recycling facilities and develop end-markets for the use of recycled tyre materials*
2. *Works with Tyre Stewardship Australia to develop and deliver public education programs and initiatives that support the Recycling Victoria programs.*
3. *Monitors illegal tyre dumping on Council owned land at known dumping sites for six months.*
4. *Explores opportunities to collaborate with our neighbouring councils to develop a regional response to tackle a common problem.*
5. *Receives a report back to Council within nine months on progress, including potential pilot programs or partnerships to reduce illegal tyre dumping in Merri-bek.*

1. Policy Context

Reports from Advisory Committees to Council are provided in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

The Merri-bek Art Acquisition and Collection Development Policy guides the acquisition of pieces for the Merri-bek Art Collection, whether by purchasing or commissioning artworks, or as the recipient of donations, gifts or bequests.

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) and the Governance Rules set out the requirements for keeping and reporting records of meetings held under the auspices of Council.

Council's Governance Rules contains provisions which enable the Chairperson to take a question On Notice, with a considered written response being provided to the questioner, in circumstances including where the question requires information that is either not available or accessible at the time of that meeting, or where the time allowed for Public Question Time has elapsed.

The Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy has been updated in response to a Notice of Motion from October 2025. Grammatical updates have also been made.

2. Background

The Governance Report is prepared as a monthly report to Council to provide a single reporting platform for a range of statutory compliance, transparency, and governance related matters.

In accordance with best practice principles and good governance practice, and to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Act, this report incorporates matters including reporting of Advisory Committees, records of meetings held under the auspice of Council, items relating to the delegation of Council powers and duties, and policy and strategy reporting.

3. Issues

Advisory Committee minutes

A summary of the minutes of advisory committees is provided at **Attachment 1** for Council's information as follows:

- a) Arts Advisory Committee held 19 May 2026.

The Arts Advisory Committee minutes contain recommendations for the annual acquisition of art for the Merri-bek Art Collection and contains attachments detailing the rationale for the recommendations.

Records of Meetings held under the auspice of Council

Records of matters discussed at meetings organised or hosted by Merri-bek that involve Councillors and Council officers are kept in accordance with the Governance Rules.

Meeting Records must include meeting attendees, including organisations represented by external presenters; the title of matters discussed; and any conflicts of interests disclosed and whether the declarant of a conflict of interests recused themselves from the meeting.

Some examples include Councillor Briefings, meetings with residents/developers/clients/organisations/Government departments/statutory authorities and consultations.

Records of Meetings received since the previous Council Meeting are presented at **Attachment 2** as follows:

- Central Coburg Oversight Committee – 25 March 2026
- Central Coburg Oversight Committee – 22 April 2026
- Central Coburg Oversight Committee – 29 April 2026
- Councillor Briefing – 11 May 2026
- Councillor Briefing – 18 May 2026
- Planning Briefing – 25 May 2026
- Councillor Briefing – 1 June 2026

Responses to Questions taken On Notice at Council meetings

At Council Meetings, questions are taken On Notice during Public Question Time, where persons submitting questions are not in attendance or where the maximum allowable time for public questions has elapsed.

Questions taken On Notice are provided with a written response following the meeting for which they are submitted and reported to Council at the next practicable meeting. The questions are recorded in the meeting minutes.

The responses to questions taken On Notice at **Attachment 3** to this report relate to questions from 11 March and 8 April 2026 Council meetings regarding:

- 2026 Annual and Winter Sports Ground Tenancy Allocations
- De Chene Community Garden

Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy Review - Response to Notice of Motion

The Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy was adopted by Council in December 2023.

At the Council meeting held on 8 October 2025, Council requested that officers prepare a report reviewing the current Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy, as well as the processes by which Councillors report back after attending approved events. The report was also to consider options to limit funded attendance so that each Councillor may attend only one ALGA National General Assembly per Council term, while allowing for exceptions where necessary, such as where a Councillor holds a national role that requires ongoing attendance.

The amended policy, as detailed in **Attachment 4** to this report, incorporates the above elements of the Notice of Motion within the following sections of the policy:

- How Councillors report back after attending approved events

Section 7 Reporting

This section has been expanded to explain how Councillors report back to Council after attending approved events. It includes that verbal reports can be presented at a Council meeting under the Acknowledgements and Other Matters section of the agenda. Written reports can be submitted by completing the Attendance at an Approved Activity form in Councillor Connect or by emailing the Unit Manager Governance and Risk. The information provided will be included in the Governance report at the next scheduled Council meeting

- Options to limit funded attendance so each Councillor can only attend one ALGA National General Assembly per Council term.

Section 4.7 Australian Local Governments' (ALGA) National General Assembly

This section clarifies that Councillors may attend the ALGA National General Assembly at Council expense in accordance with a rotation model determined by Councillors. The model is intended to ensure fair and equitable access over the Council term.

The section further outlines that the rotation model must:

- aim to provide each Councillor with a reasonable opportunity to attend at least once per Council term; and
- consider factors such as previous attendance, the length of the term, and the equitable distribution of opportunities.

Additional Council-funded attendance outside the agreed rotation may be approved by Council resolution where justified. This may include circumstances where a Councillor:

- is the Mayor; or
- is elected to the ALGA Board or holds another formal representative role requiring attendance.

In addition to the changes arising from the Notice of Motion, a broader review of the policy has been undertaken. While the core provisions remain unchanged, the policy has been refined to better reflect current practice and expectations.

Key updates include:

- Modernised language and updated titles;
- Removal of outdated references and provisions that no longer reflect how operations occur and ensuring alignment with current practice;
- Clarified entitlements (e.g. global roaming, professional development);
- Reframed professional development in light of mandatory training, shifting from prescriptive rules to flexible support that builds capability, supports informed decision-making, and enables meaningful engagement aligned with Council priorities and community expectations;
- Removal of outdated processes;
- Updated reimbursement thresholds (e.g. childcare, ticketed events); and
- A minor OHS update relating to the retention of steel-capped boots.

Tyre Dumping - Response to Notice of Motion

In response to the Tyre Dumping Notice of Motion adopted at the September 2025 Council meeting, Council has progressed actions to address illegal tyre dumping across Merri-bek.

Council has proactively monitored tyre dumping across Merri-bek. Approximately 1,500 tyres have been dumped across the municipality, with incidents involving large numbers of tyres decreasing over this period. Council has not been able to identify any specific dumping hotspots, as incidents have occurred randomly and generally in small numbers.

Council has written to the Minister for Environment requesting strengthened Environment Protection Authority (EPA) resourcing and powers. Consistent with this request, the State Government has announced additional funding for the EPA to combat illegal dumping across Victoria. Council officers have actively supported the commencement of these additional resources and have provided commentary and data to the EPA on the issues affecting Merri-bek in relation to tyre dumping.

In May, Council officers attended the first forum convened by the EPA Illegal Waste Dumping Taskforce. As this taskforce develops, Council will seek to remain actively involved in its implementation and in coordinated responses with neighbouring councils and the EPA to address not only illegal tyre dumping, but also broader community education and engagement on illegal waste dumping. This is expected to support a coordinated statewide approach to raising community awareness and building the capacity of businesses, including Tyre Stewardship Australia, to deliver education that reinforces that illegal waste dumping is a crime.

Community impact

Advisory committees provide a valuable communication and consultation link between the organisation, Councillors, Council and the community.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

In addressing illegal tyre dumping, these actions support Council's climate emergency and environmental sustainability priorities by reducing environmental harm, improving waste management outcomes, and promoting responsible disposal practices across the community.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, and this report does not contravene or limit any of the 20 fundamental human rights as set out in the Charter.

4. Community consultation and engagement

Advisory committees provide a valuable communication and consultation link between the organisation, Councillors, Council and the community.

Public Question Time provides an opportunity for the community to engage with and direct their questions and statements directly to the Council.

Affected persons rights and interests

This report and its recommended decision does not affect any person's rights.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in the matters listed.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

The purchase of the artwork is included in the adopted Budget 2025/26.

There are no other financial and/or resource implications as a result of this report.

7. Implementation

Governance activity, including reports of Committees to Council, Records of Meetings and Community Question Time items will continue to be reported to Council monthly.

Subject to Council's decision the next steps include:

- Purchasing the artworks listed in the Officer Recommendation.
- Seeking quotes for the ongoing storage and maintenance associated with the donation of the artwork listed in the Officer Recommendation.

Subject to Council's decision, when adopted, the revised Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy will be uploaded to the internet as a public policy and communicated to relevant Council officers

Attachment/s

1	Reports from Advisory Committees to Council - June 2026	D26/223726
2	Records of Meetings - June 2026	D26/236173
3	Responses to questions taken On Notice - June 2026	D26/243062
4	Councillor Support Expenses and Resources Policy	D26/243549

ARTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE - 19 MAY 2026

A report of the Arts Advisory Committee meeting held on 19 May 2026 are provided for Council's information.

Councillors appointed to the Arts Advisory Committee: *Cr Jay Iwasaki (apology)*. Meeting attended by *Cr Ella Svensson*.

Key Items Discussed

- Coburg Library consultation
- Arts grants update and consultation
- Festivals update
- Art acquisition proposals

Disclosures of Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was disclosed at the meeting.

Committee Recommendation

That Council endorses the recommendation of the Arts Advisory Committee meeting held 19 May 2026 and in accordance with the *Art Acquisition and Collection Development Policy*, and approves the following artwork donations and purchases for the Merri-bek Art Collection:

1. Mai Ei, *Where is a Place for Me to Sleep in Peace*, 2021, photographic print (\$6,000)
2. Safa El Samad, *Textiles in Gaza*, 2025, calico and polyester thread (\$5,000)
3. Judy Kuo, *Labour of Love*, 2026, felt tip marker on paper (\$60)
4. Judy Kuo, *Create Together*, 2026, felt tip marker on paper (\$60)
5. Monica Oppen & Peter Lyssiotis, *War Against War/War or Peace*, 2025, digital and print book (donation from the artists)
6. Noel Counihan, 5 paintings, 2 drawings, 7 prints (donation from the Malcolm Macmillan Collection)
7. Chris Bond, *Painting after Michelle's brain surgery*, 2007, oil on linen on MDF (donation from Olivia Poloni, storage housing costs \$7,000).

Attachment/s

- | | | |
|---|---|------------|
| 1 | Arts and Culture - Merri-bek Art Collection - Summary of May 2026 Acquisition Proposals | D26/223610 |
| 2 | Arts and Culture - Merri-bek Art Collection - May 2026 Acquisition Proposals | D26/223614 |



Proposed Acquisitions

The total 2025–26 budget for Collection Acquisitions is \$25,750

Budget expended:

1. Framing of prior acquisitions, totaling \$3,690
2. Endorsed Acquisition: *Portrait of John Englart* by Maggie Cowling, purchased for \$1,800

Budget remaining: \$20,260

Proposed Purchases

Artist	Artwork details	Purchase price
Ma Ei	<i>Where is a Place for Us to Sleep in Peace?</i> , 2021, photographic print, edition 1 of 10, 81 x 139 cm (unframed)	\$6,000 + framing costs
	<i>Metamorphosis</i> , 2023, photographic print, edition 1 of 10, 91 x 64 cm (unframed)	\$4,000 + framing costs
Safa El Samad	<i>Textiles in Gaza</i> , 2025, polyester thread on calico, 75 x 98 cm (framed)	\$5,000
Bundit Puangthong	2 from 4 available paintings:	\$5,000
	<i>Skinless</i> , 2023	
	<i>The House of Herbs</i> , 2023	
	<i>The Crocodile that Never Found</i> , 2023	
	<i>No Single</i> , 2023	
	All oil on board, 43 x 33 cm (framed)	
Judy Kuo	<i>Labour of Love</i> , felt tip marker on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm (unframed)	\$60 + framing costs
	<i>Create Together</i> , felt tip marker on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm (unframed)	\$60 + framing costs
Sub-total:		\$20,120

Proposed Donations – Outright Gifts

Donor	Artwork details	Condition of offer
Estate of Malcom Macmillan, c/- Edith L. Bavin	Malcom MacMillan Collection: 5 paintings, 7 prints and 2 drawings by Noel Counihan	It is requested as a condition of the donation that the collection remains intact and all works are accepted.
Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis (artists)	Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis, <i>War Against War / War or Peace</i> , 2025, artist book	N/A

Deferred Donation – Storage Cost Review

The following donation was proposed in 2024–25 and deferred by the Arts Advisory Committee until an archival storage solution and costs could be sourced.

These costs would be deducted from the 2025–26 acquisitions budget, reducing the funds available for purchasing new acquisitions. A selection of the proposed acquisitions could be deferred to 2026–27.

Donor	Artwork details	Storage Costs
Olivia Poloni	Chris Bond, <i>Painting after Michelle's brain surgery</i> , 2007, oil on linen on MDF, 37 pieces, dimensions variable	An assessment and quotation were sourced from International Conservation Services: \$7,020 + GST

2026 Merri-bek Art Collection Acquisition Rationale Ma Ei

Artist name	Ma Ei
Year of birth	1978
Location of artist	Melbourne, Australia



Artwork title	<i>Where is a Place for Us to Sleep in Peace?</i>
Year	2021
Medium	Photographic Print
Edition	Edition 1 of 10
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	81 x 139 cm
Exhibition history	Pit Yourself Against, Counihan Gallery. 4 February to Sunday 19 April 2026
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	To be framed for display and storage
Price (GST inclusive)	\$6,000
Is GST applicable?	No
Vendor	Ma Ei

Artist name	Ma Ei
Year of birth	1978
Location of artist	Melbourne, Australia
	
Artwork title	Metamorphosis
Year	2023
Medium	Photographic Print
Edition	Edition 1 of 10
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	91 x 64 cm
Exhibition history	<i>Pit Yourself Against</i> , Counihan Gallery, 4 February to 19 April 2026
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	To be framed for display and storage
Price (GST inclusive)	\$4,000
Is GST applicable?	No
Vendor	Ma Ei

Recommendation and Collection Relevance

It is recommended that both photographs by Ma Ei – *Where is a Place for Us to Sleep in Peace?* (2021) and *Metamorphosis* (2023) – be acquired for the Merri-bek Art Collection.

Ma Ei is a Burmese artist and refugee who came to Australia following the 2021 Myanmar military coup. A multi-disciplinary artist working across performance, photography and video, her work has recently featured in the Counihan Gallery program, including the 2025 Winter Night Screen and the 2026 solo exhibition, *Pit Yourself Against*.

The artist's practice and proposed acquisitions strongly align with key acquisition criteria for the Collection. Shaped by political activism and lived experience, Ma Ei's work highlights the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar while exploring broader experiences of conflict, displacement and resilience. Her practice demonstrates the socially and politically engaged approaches that underpin both the Counihan Gallery program and Merri-bek's collecting priorities.

These works would strengthen the representation of culturally diverse artistic voices within the Collection and introduce the first works by a Burmese artist.

Selection criteria

The proposed acquisitions meet the following key acquisition criteria that form the Merri-bek Art Collection Policy 2024–2029.

A work that:

- Shows a distinctive and verifiable connection with the City of Merri-bek, such as being a work of art by an artist who has lived, worked, exhibited or contributed to the creative culture of Merri-bek.
- Engages with important social, cultural or environmental issues.
- Enhances the status and diversity of the Merri-bek Art Collection

Artwork significance

Where is a Place for Us to Sleep in Peace? was a key work in the artist's solo exhibition at the Counihan Gallery. It is part of an ongoing photographic series responding to the 2021 Myanmar military coup that reflects on the impossibility of safety and rest during times of political conflict. This photograph is the eleventh work in the series and the third image produced after the artist arrived as a refugee in Australia. Created at Williamstown Beach, it extends ideas of peace, vulnerability and care beyond humanitarian concerns to include the natural world.

Metamorphosis also featured in the exhibition and is dedicated to people who cross borders in search of work, risking their lives in pursuit of stability and safety. The work draws on a real incident in which people from Myanmar were hidden among bags of vegetables on a truck while attempting to cross into Thailand for work. During a police inspection, their presence was discovered after the bags were pierced. Referencing Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, this work is a powerful reflection on the dehumanisation of displaced people within global systems of inequality.

For Ma Ei, her work speaks not only to personal experience and the situation in Myanmar, but to broader experiences of political conflict and displacement shared across many communities in Australia. Acquiring these works would support an important contemporary artistic voice and strengthen the presence of underrepresented perspectives within the Collection, introducing the first works by a Burmese artist.

Artist biography

Ma Ei is a multidisciplinary artist exploring feminist themes, gender equality and peace through painting, drawing, photography, performance, and video. Forced to leave Myanmar after fighting against the military coup regime in 2021, she now lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.

Ma Ei has exhibited in more than 50 exhibitions across Myanmar, Asia, Europe, and Australia. She has participated in the Hong Kong & Myanmar Performance art exchange, 12th AsiaTopia International Performance Festival (Thailand), PanAsia International Performance Festival (Korea), The Longest Day Performance Festival (Switzerland), ZAZ Performance Festival (Israel) and participated in contemporary artist residencies and programs in London, Sweden, USA, Japan and Australia. In 2021, Ma Ei presented work in the 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at QAGOMA, Brisbane, with Gertrude Contemporary.

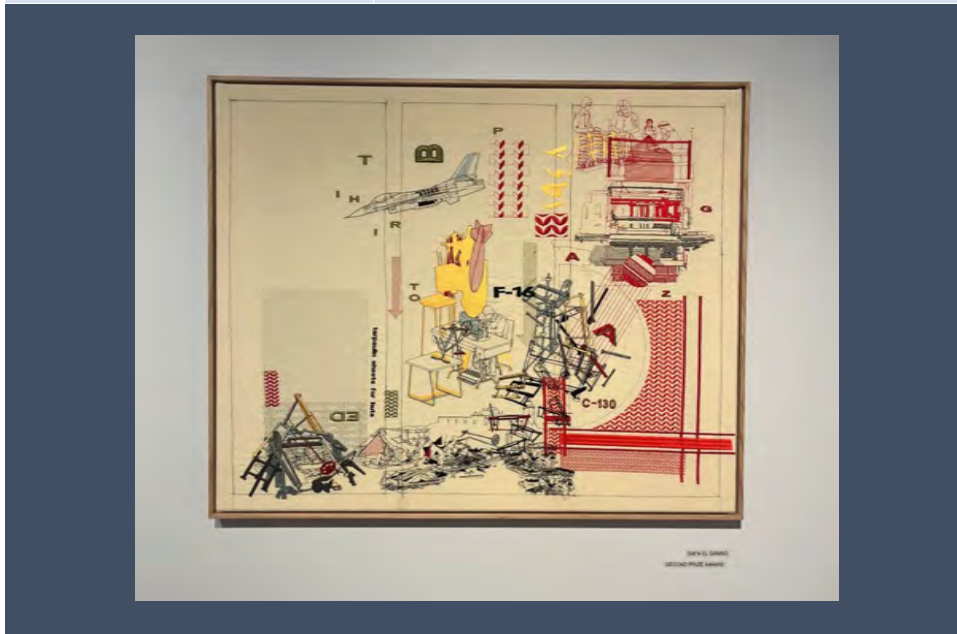
References

Yi Li, 'Ma Ei: Look at the Calf', *Art Guide Australia*, 6 February 2026, <https://artguide.com.au/ma-ei-look-at-the-calf/>

'Artist Talk: Mia Boe and Ma Ei in Conversation with Amelia Winata', Gertrude Contemporary, 26 August 2023, <https://gertrude.org.au/public-program/artist-talk-mia-boe-in-conversation-with-amelia-winata>

2026 Merri-bek Art Collection Acquisition Rationale Safa El Samad

Artist name	Safa El Samad
Year of birth	1994
Location of artist	Melbourne, Australia



Artwork title	Textiles in Gaza
Year	2025
Medium	Polyester thread on Calico
Edition	n/a
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	75 x 98 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2026 Wyndham Art Prize, Wyndham Art Gallery, awarded 2nd place, 22 January – 22 March 2026 – Machine Residue, Trocadero Projects, 1 October – 2 November 2025
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	Framed artwork with no special storage or conservation requirements.
Price (GST inclusive)	\$5,000
Is GST applicable?	No
Vendor	Safa El Samad

Recommendation and Collection Relevance

It is recommended that *Textiles in Gaza* by Safa El Samad be acquired for the Merri-bek Art Collection.

Safa is a second-generation Lebanese settler and artist living in Melbourne with strong ties to Merri-bek. She engages the local community through Dukkana in Coburg, a space established with her sisters in their father's former Lebanese Grocery Store that has become a place for culture, making and connection. Safa also facilitates embroidery workshops for community participants, including programs hosted at the Counihan Gallery.

Safa's creative practice and the proposed acquisition align strongly with key acquisition criteria for the Collection. The artist has a demonstrated connection to Merri-bek, and her work engages with current social and political issues through an innovative use of embroidery and textile-based storytelling in response to the war in Gaza.

The artist's practice also reflects current directions in contemporary art through its focus on textiles, repair and participatory making. Recognised with second prize in the 2026 Wyndham Contemporary Art Prize, this acquisition would add a timely and significant contemporary work to the Collection.

Selection criteria

The proposed acquisitions meet the following key acquisition criteria that form the Merri-bek Art Collection Policy 2024–2029. A work that:

- Shows a distinctive and verifiable connection with the City of Merri-bek, such as being a work of art by an artist who has lived, worked, exhibited or contributed to the creative culture of Merri-bek.
- Engages with important social, cultural or environmental issues.
- Enhances the status and diversity of the Merri-bek Art Collection
- Demonstrates innovation or reflects current trends within a broader context of contemporary Australian art

Artwork significance

Textiles in Gaza explores resilience, displacement and the continuation of cultural traditions in response to the war in Gaza.

The following artist statement highlights how the work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary global events, offering a perspective grounded in material culture and acts of making:

'This work traces the significance of textiles in Gaza – from the origin of the word gauze, thought to stem from the region, to tatreez and the keffiyeh as enduring symbols of cultural resilience and resistance. It reflects the current reality in Gaza, where people are forced into makeshift textile shelters under Israeli occupation. Displaced Palestinians have burned looms for firewood while tarpaulin, vital for tents, is among 51 items prohibited from entering Gaza by Israeli Authorities. Despite these challenges, Palestinians find innovative ways to operate sewing machines without electricity, construct tents with limited materials, and survive against all odds.'

Created using a semi-industrial embroidery machine, the work reflects Safa's ongoing interest in embroidery techniques, histories and material processes. For her, embroidery functions as both a method of making and a carrier of cultural knowledge, memory and lived experience.

This work would bring an important contemporary perspective to the Collection through its use of textile traditions to address displacement, survival and the profound impacts of ongoing conflict on everyday civilian life.

Artist biography

Safa El Samad is a Melbourne-based multi-disciplinary artist who studied Fashion at RMIT and recently completed a Master of Architecture at Monash University. Working predominantly with embroidery, Safa reworks and salvages materials that might otherwise be discarded, challenging the perceived value of objects and resisting a culture of disposability. In this way, she not only retains the history of materials but adds to it, imbuing them with the urgency of the present moment.

Safa held her first solo exhibition *You are Not Alone* at Suite 7a, Sydney, in 2024 and has exhibited in recent Melbourne group exhibitions such as *Labour & Love* (West Space, 2026), *Machine Residue* (Trocadero, 2025) and *Hearts Desire* (Holy Trinity, 2025). In 2025, she was commissioned to create the artwork, *Fruits of My Father's Labour*, for the Wyndham City Lightbox Program.

References

'Safa El Samad', Wyndham Art Prize, exhibition catalogue, 2026, p. 23

'If it doesn't spark joy, embroider it', Craft, <https://craft.org.au/makers/read-watch/article-index/if-it-doesnt-spark-joy-embroider-it/>.

'Safa El Samad', Monash Art, Design and Architecture (MADA), Monash University, <https://www.monash.edu/mada/careers/safa-el-samad>.

2026 Merri-bek Art Collection Acquisition Rationale Bundit Puangthong

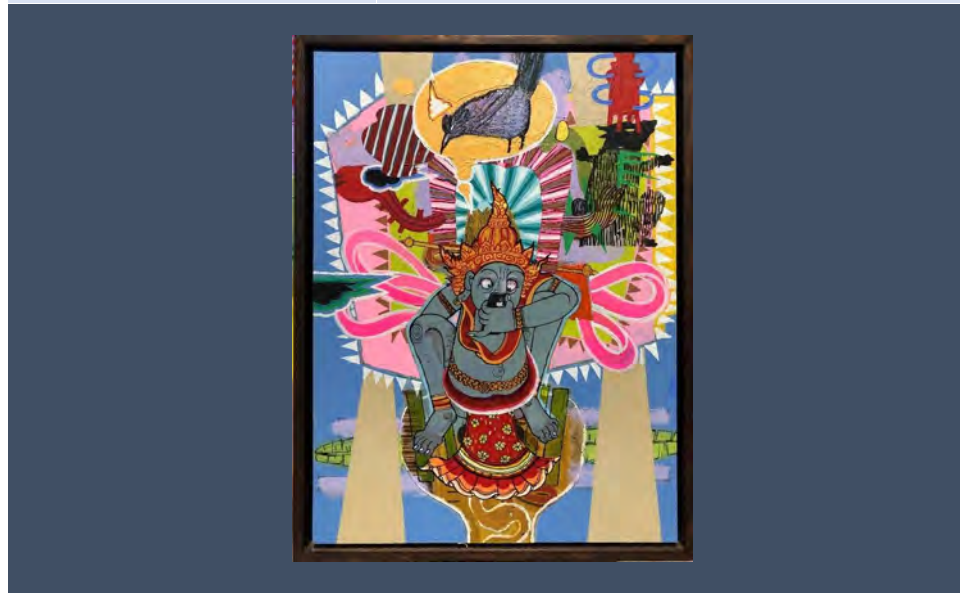
Artist name	Bundit Puangthong
Year of birth	1969
Location of artist	born in Thailand, arrived in Australia 2000. Lives and works in Melbourne.



Artwork title	Skinless
Year	2023
Medium	Acrylic paint on plywood
Edition	N/A
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	43 x 33 cm (framed in Victorian Ash tray frame)
Exhibition history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Edwina Corlette Gallery, Deep Water, 27 Nov – 14 Dec 2024 - Edwina Corlette Gallery, One Part of the Story, 2 – 16 Dec 2023 - @14 Langridge (14 Langridge St, Collingwood), One Part of the Story, presented by Edwina Corlette, 8 – 13 Nov 2023
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	Framed artwork with no special storage or conservation requirements
Price (GST inclusive)	\$3,000 each. Two paintings can be purchased for \$5,000. Four paintings for \$9,500
Is GST applicable?	No

Vendor	Bundit Puangthong
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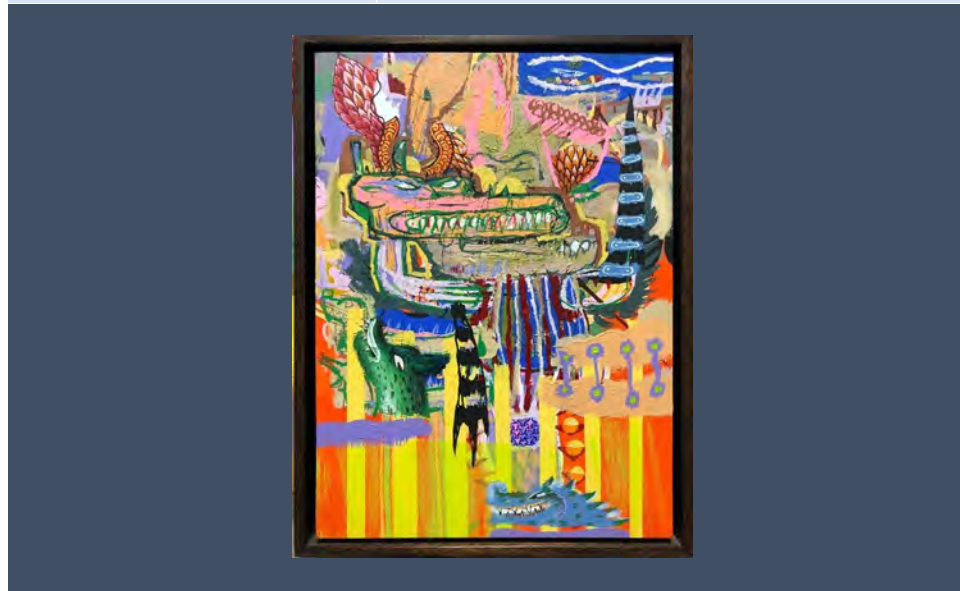
Artist name	Bundit Puangthong
Year of birth	1969
Location of artist	born in Thailand, arrived in Australia 2000. Lives and works in Melbourne



Artwork title	No Single
Year	2023
Medium	Acrylic paint on plywood
Edition	N/A
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	43 x 33 cm (framed in Victorian Ash tray frame)
Exhibition history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Edwina Corlette Gallery, Deep Water, 27 Nov – 14 Dec 2024 - Edwina Corlette Gallery, One Part of the Story, 2 – 16 Dec 2023 - @14 Langridge (14 Langridge St, Collingwood), One Part of the Story, presented by Edwina Corlette, 8 – 13 Nov 2023
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	Framed artwork with no special storage or conservation requirements
Price (GST inclusive)	\$3,000 each. Two paintings can be purchased for \$5,000. Four paintings for \$9,500
Is GST applicable?	No

Vendor	Bundit Puangthong
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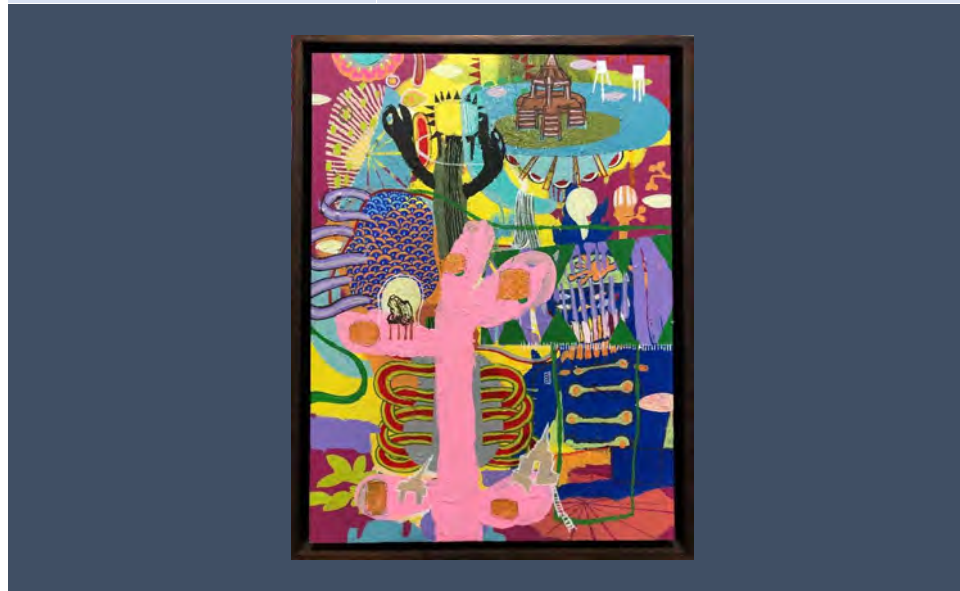
Artist name	Bundit Puangthong
Year of birth	1969
Location of artist	born in Thailand, arrived in Australia 2000. Lives and works in Melbourne



Artwork title	The Crocodile that Never Found
Year	2023
Medium	Acrylic paint on plywood
Edition	N/A
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	43 x 33 cm (framed in Victorian Ash tray frame)
Exhibition history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Edwina Corlette Gallery, Deep Water, 27 Nov – 14 Dec 2024 - Edwina Corlette Gallery, One Part of the Story, 2 – 16 Dec 2023 - @14 Langridge (14 Langridge St, Collingwood), One Part of the Story, presented by Edwina Corlette, 8 – 13 Nov 2023
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	Framed artwork with no special storage or conservation requirements
Price (GST inclusive)	\$3,000 each. Two paintings can be purchased for \$5,000. Four paintings for \$9,500
Is GST applicable?	No

Vendor	Bundit Puangthong
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Artist name	Bundit Puangthong
Year of birth	1969
Location of artist	born in Thailand, arrived in Australia 2000. Lives and works in Melbourne



Artwork title	The House of Herbs
Year	2023
Medium	Acrylic paint on plywood
Edition	N/A
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	43 x 33 cm (framed in Victorian Ash tray frame)
Exhibition history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Edwina Corlette Gallery, Deep Water, 27 Nov – 14 Dec 2024 - Edwina Corlette Gallery, One Part of the Story, 2 – 16 Dec 2023 - @14 Langridge (14 Langridge St, Collingwood), One Part of the Story, presented by Edwina Corlette, 8 – 13 Nov 2023
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	Framed artwork with no special storage or conservation requirements
Price (GST inclusive)	\$3,000 each. Two paintings can be purchased for \$5,000. Four paintings for \$9,500
Is GST applicable?	No

Vendor	Bundit Puangthong
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Recommendation and Collection Relevance

It is recommended that **two of the four works** by Bundit Puangthong be acquired as a focussed representation of this series for the Merri-bek Art Collection.

Bundit is a Merri-bek-based artist with a long and ongoing connection to the area. He has lived and worked locally for more than 20 years, contributing to the creative community as both an artist and frame maker. He is represented in the Collection through a collaborative work with fellow Thai artist Vipoo Srivilasa; however, this would be the first acquisition of his individual work.

The artist's practice and the proposed acquisitions align strongly with key acquisition criteria for the Collection. Bundit has a strong connection to Merri-bek, and the proposed works engage with social and cultural themes that reflect personal perspectives on migration and cross-cultural life.

Combining traditional Thai painting techniques with influences drawn from Pop and street art, Bundit has developed a distinctive visual language that would make an important addition to the Collection and strengthen its representation of current contemporary art.

The proposed works also present a rare opportunity to acquire smaller-scale works by the artist, whose practice typically focuses on larger formats, making them particularly well suited to the Collection's storage and display requirements.

Selection criteria

The proposed acquisitions meet the following key acquisition criteria that form the Merri-bek Art Collection Policy 2024–2029.

A work that:

- Shows a distinctive and verifiable connection with the City of Merri-bek, such as being a work of art by an artist who has lived, worked, exhibited or contributed to the creative culture of Merri-bek.
- Engages with important social, cultural or environmental issues
- Enhances the status and diversity of the Merri-bek Art Collection
- Demonstrates innovation or reflects current trends within a broader context of contemporary Australian art.

Artwork significance

In this series of works, the artist shares personal stories about his upbringing in Thailand, from village and family life to everyday cultural differences.

The House of Herbs reflects on his grandmother's home as a place of care, healing and safety, linking artistic practice to intergenerational knowledge.

Skinless depicts a snake that frequented the village, recalling the unease and attentiveness its unpredictable presence brought to daily life.

The Crocodile that Never Found recalls a cautionary village tale used to warn children away from the river, particularly regarding pets that might attract crocodiles.

No Single takes a humorous approach to cultural difference through the everyday contrast between Western-style and squat toilets.

Together, the works explore memory, family history and cultural inheritance through metaphor, humour, and storytelling. They demonstrate Bundit's distinctive approach to painting, reworking personal and cultural experiences into layered narratives of identity and belonging. The acquisition would strengthen the Collection's representation of culturally diverse perspectives and recognise the contribution of a long-term Merri-bek artist to the local creative community.

Artist biography

Bundit Puangthong is a Thailand-born, Melbourne-based contemporary painter whose practice explores the in-between space of living across two cultures. Drawing on a family lineage of temple arts practitioners and early training in traditional temple painting, his work is grounded in personal and cultural memory, often described as a visual diary made up of interconnected 'chapters'.

Undertaking initial studies at the Academy of Arts, Nakorn Si Thammarat, Thailand, in 1989, he was awarded a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Chiang Mai University, Thailand, in 1995; a Diploma of Visual Arts, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT), in 2003; a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) from the Australian Academy of Design, Charles Stuart University, in 2004; and a Master of Visual Arts from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, in 2005.

Bundit regularly exhibits his work at Edwina Corlette Gallery, Brisbane, and in 2025 he undertook a major commission for the State Library Victoria exhibition, *Creative Acts: Artists and Their Inspirations*. He has been a finalist in several significant Australian art prizes, including the Sunshine Coast Art Prize at Caloundra Regional Gallery, the Arthur Guy Painting Prize at Bendigo Art Gallery, and the Geelong Art Prize at Geelong Gallery (all 2021).

References

'Bundit Puangthong', Edwina Corlette Gallery, <https://edwinacorlette.com/artists/bundit-puangthong#~:bio>


'Bundit Puangthong', State Library Victoria, <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/stories/monograph-bundit-puangthong>

2026 Merri-bek Art Collection Acquisition Rationale Judy Kuo

Artist name	Judy Kuo
Year of birth	To be confirmed
Location of artist	Melbourne, Victoria



Artwork title	Labour of Love
Year	2026
Medium	Felt tip marker on paper
Edition	N/A
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	42 x 29.7 cm
Exhibition history	Judy Kuo: Not a Fine Artist just a "Fine" Artist, Counihan Gallery, 2 May to 19 July 2026
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	To be framed for display and storage
Price (GST inclusive)	\$60
Is GST applicable?	No
Vendor	Judy Kuo

Artist name	Judy Kuo
Year of birth	To be confirmed
Location of artist	Melbourne, Victoria
	
Artwork title	Create Together
Year	2026
Medium	Felt tip marker on paper
Edition	N/A
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	42 x 29.7cm
Exhibition history	Judy Kuo: Not a Fine Artist just a "Fine" Artist, Counihan Gallery, 2 May to 19 July 2026
Provenance (if applicable)	Directly from the artist
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	To be framed for display and storage
Price (GST inclusive)	\$60
Is GST applicable?	No
Vendor	Judy Kuo

Recommendation and Collection Relevance

It is recommended that the two drawings by Judy Kuo – *Labour of Love* and *Create Together* – are acquired for the Merri-bek Art Collection as a focused representation of the broader series currently presented in the artist's solo exhibition at the Counihan Gallery: *Not a Fine Artist just a "Fine" Artist*, (2 May – 19 July 2026).

Judy is an artist, activist and unionist, living and working on Wurundjeri Country, with strong ties to the Merri-bek community through their creative practice. They have an ongoing relationship with the Counihan Gallery, having previously exhibited in the 2023 group exhibition *Real Job*, which explored perceptions of art and labour.

Through drawing, printmaking and zine-making, Judy's practice engages with themes of labour, solidarity and collective organising, creating a strong thematic connection to existing works in the Collection concerned with worker's rights, activism and social justice. The affordability of the proposed works also reflects Judy's broader ethos of accessibility, positioning art as something to be shared widely rather than treated as exclusive or elite.

The proposed acquisition aligns with several key criteria in the Collection Policy, including the artist's strong connection to Merri-bek and the works' engagement with contemporary social and political issues. These works would also mark the first acquisition of Judy's work into the Collection.

Selection criteria

The proposed acquisitions meet the following key acquisition criteria that form the Merri-bek Art Collection Policy 2024–2029.

A work that:

- Shows a distinctive and verifiable connection with the City of Merri-bek, such as being a work of art by an artist who has lived, worked, exhibited or contributed to the creative culture of Merri-bek.
- Engages with important social, cultural or environmental issues
- Enhances the status and diversity of the Merri-bek Art Collection
- Demonstrates innovation or reflects current trends within a broader context of contemporary Australian art.

Artwork significance

Labour of Love and *Create Together* are part of a larger drawing series in which the artist responds with humour to the pressures and expectations placed on artists and art workers. Using simple black marker on white paper, Judy reflects on the everyday reality of creative labour, including the challenge of balancing commitment, financial insecurity and the need to constantly prove the value of artistic work. The use of nothing more than pen and paper is a statement in itself: a resourceful and accessible way of making work without the need for funding or institutional support.

In *Labour of Love*, the artist responds to a well-known phrase that romanticises the reality of being an artist or arts worker, using it to highlight the gap between the emotional investment in creative work and the financial or social reward of sustaining an arts practice.

In *Create Together*, Judy emphasises collaboration and shared effort, highlighting the value of making and sustaining work collectively rather than individually.

Together, these works would add a contemporary, grounded perspective on labour, solidarity and creative practice to the Merri-bek Art Collection, reflecting the realities of working artists and the communities they are part of.

Artist biography

Judy Kuo is a unionist, activist and self-taught artist living and working on Wurundjeri land. They have a long-held interest in the intersection of politics and art, having written their Honours thesis on the topic at the Australian National University's School of Sociology, and now developing a politically engaged art practice.

Judy currently works as a Research Organiser at the Victorian Trades Hall Council and is passionate about working class solidarity across anti-racism and social justice movements. As a child of multiple generations of refugees, she is also an advocate for refugee rights and uses visual art as part of her contribution to this work.

References

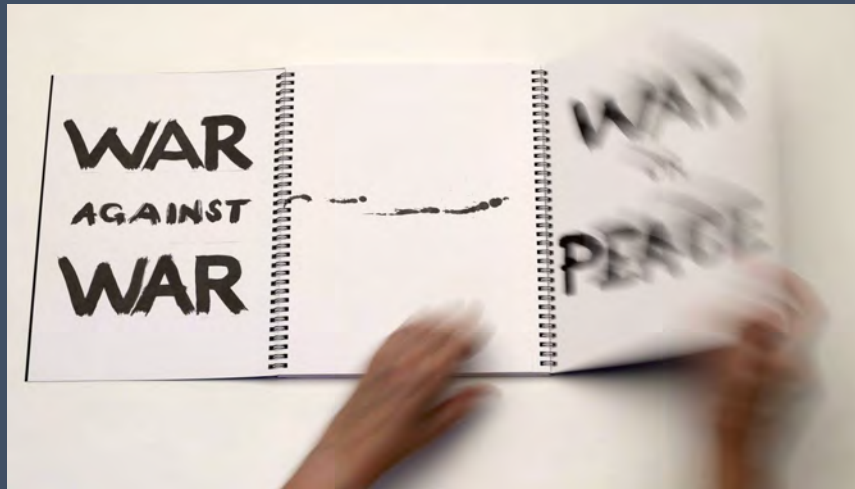
'About', Judy Kuo Big Cartel, <https://judykuo.bigcartel.com/about>

'Judy Kuo', Refugee Advice & Casework Service, <https://www.racs.org.au/news/judy-kuo>

'Judy Kuo', I Am Not a Virus Australia, <https://iamnotavirusaustralia.org.au/judy-kuo/>

2026 Merri-bek Art Collection Acquisition Rationale Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis

Artist name	Monica Oppen
Year of birth	1964
Location of artist	Sydney
Artist name	Peter Lyssiotis
Year of birth	1949
Location of artist	Melbourne



Artwork title	War Against War / War or Peace
Year	2025
Medium	Artist book, digital print (boxed)
Edition	Edition of 24 (un-numbered)
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	22 x 30 x 2 cm
Exhibition history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crescendo25 Artist Book Award, Clifton School of Arts Gallery and Arts Centre, NSW, 15 November to 30 November 2025 (Winner) - 2025 Libris Awards, Artspace Mackay, 5 July to 14 September 2025 (Finalist) - Between the Sheets: Artists' Books 2025, Gallery East in conjunction with Gallery Central, WA, 15 August to 19 September 2025.
Provenance (if applicable)	Gift from the artists
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No special storage or conservation requirements
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Recommendation and Collection Relevance

It is recommended that *War Against War / War or Peace* by Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis be accepted as an outright gift from the artists to the Merri-bek Art Collection.

This collaborative artist book strongly aligns with the Collection’s focus on socially and politically engaged art and connects directly to Noel Counihan’s *War or Peace* (1979), an artist book of linocuts responding to the atrocities of World War Two that is held in the Collection. Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis are both represented in the Collection through the artist book, *Dare to Vote* (Oppen, 2012), and the artist zine, *Eyewitness* (Lyssiotis and Theo Strasser, 2009), reflecting their ongoing relevance to the Collection.

Both artists are recognised for their innovative use of artist publishing as a form of political commentary and this work has received recognition through several artist book prizes, including the Crescendo25 Artist Book Award.

Artist books are an increasingly prominent medium within contemporary art, and this donation would strengthen the Collection’s holdings in this area while expanding its representation of collaborative and politically engaged publishing practices.

Selection criteria

The proposed acquisitions meet the following key acquisition criteria that form the Merri-bek Art Collection Policy 2024–229.

A work that:

- Shows a distinctive and verifiable connection with the City of Merri-bek, such as being a work of art by an artist who has lived, worked, exhibited or contributed to the creative culture of Merri-bek.

- Engages with important social, cultural or environmental issues.
- Enhances the status and diversity of the Merri-bek Art Collection
- Demonstrates innovation or reflects current trends within a broader context of contemporary Australian art

Artwork significance

Inspired by Noel Counihan's *War or Peace* and referencing Ernst Friedrich's 1924 publication *War Against War*, the proposed donation by Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis reflects on the enduring realities and human cost of war.

Combining documentary imagery, altered text and protest material, this artist book examines how war is shaped through propaganda, violence and political power. Its collaborative format draws on traditions of activist print culture and socially engaged artist publishing.

The work would contribute to a lineage of anti-war works within the Merri-bek Collection, including posters, prints, zines and artist books connected to peace activism and social justice. Its acquisition would add depth to these holdings, while strengthening the Collection's representation of contemporary Australian artist publishing practices.

Artist biographies

Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis are well-established artists who use the artist book as a political form, carefully aligning its structure with the subject to create sharp social and political commentary. Both artists are represented in major national and international collections, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Rhode Island School of Design, the Museum of Australian Photography and the State Library of NSW.

Monica Oppen

Monica Oppen is a Sydney based bookartist, publishing under the imprint Ant Press which she runs. She studied printmaking at East Technical Collage (now the National Art School) and at City Art Institute (now NSW Art and Design). She has trained and worked as a hand binder. Her books are in public and private collections in Australia and overseas.

Born in Switzerland in 1964, Monica Oppen began her love of collecting art books in the 1980's while studying at art school in Australia. Oppen's interest in artist books has informed her practice as a printmaker, writer and experienced book binder. The artist's works are informed by the process of book making itself, and how this introspective and intuitive practice corresponds with the outward reaching and critical engagement of collecting and reading artist books.

Peter Lyssiotis

Peter Lyssiotis (1949–) was born in Cyprus and has been based in Australia since 1953. He completed a Bachelor of Arts in 1969 at La Trobe University and a Diploma in Education at Rusden College in 1973. He is a teacher, writer, filmmaker and visual artist who has been exhibiting his works since the early 1980s. He works with photography, particularly focussing on found photographs, photomontage and photo books.

References

'Books – ANT Press', Antpress.com.au, 2025, antpress.com.au/books/, accessed 21 March 2026

'About – ANT Press', Antpress.com.au, 2025, antpress.com.au/about/, accessed 12 April 2026

Peter Lyssiotis (2019), Maph.org.au; Museum of Australian Photography, <https://maph.org.au/artists/456/>, accessed 12 April 2026

'Artspace Mackay – Libris Awards', Artspacemackay.com.au, 2025,
www.artspacemackay.com.au/whats_on/artists_books/libris_awards, accessed 12 April 2026.


'Between the Sheets: Artists Books 2025'. Gallerycentral.com.au, 2025,
www.gallerycentral.com.au/between-the-sheets/.


'Peter Lyssiotis at Monash: Forty Years of Art, Books and the Migrant Story', M-Artlens, 29 June 2025, m-artlens.com/peter-lyssiotis-at-monash-forty-years-of-art-books-and-the-migrant-story/, accessed 12 April 2026


Cresendo25 Dianne Fogwell's Judges notes, (n.d.), Lisasewards.com.au, 2025, [CRESENDO25-Dianne-Fogwell_Judges-notes-Crescendo25.pdf](#), accessed 12 April 2026

Eyewitness / Theo Strasser, Peter Lyssiotis (2026), Nla.gov.au,
<https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/4404379>, accessed 15 April 2026

2026 Merri-bek Art Collection Acquisition Rationale Edith L. Bavin and Malcolm Macmillan Collection

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986
	
Artwork title	A Girl's Head
Year	1968
Medium	Print: Lithograph
Edition	35 of 40
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	92 x 84 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist, Counihan Gallery, 10 October to 10 November 2002
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan An edition of this print is already held in the Merri-bek Art Collection. It also features in other public collections including: - Christchurch Art Gallery - Art Gallery of New South Wales
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986
	
Artwork title	A Memory of Italy
Year	1959
Medium	Print: Linocut
Edition	33 of 50
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	43 x 66 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	10 October to 10 November 2002: Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist, Counihan Gallery.
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan This print is held in other public collections including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Art Gallery of South Australia - Queensland Art Gallery - National Gallery of Australia - National Gallery of Victoria - Deakin University
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

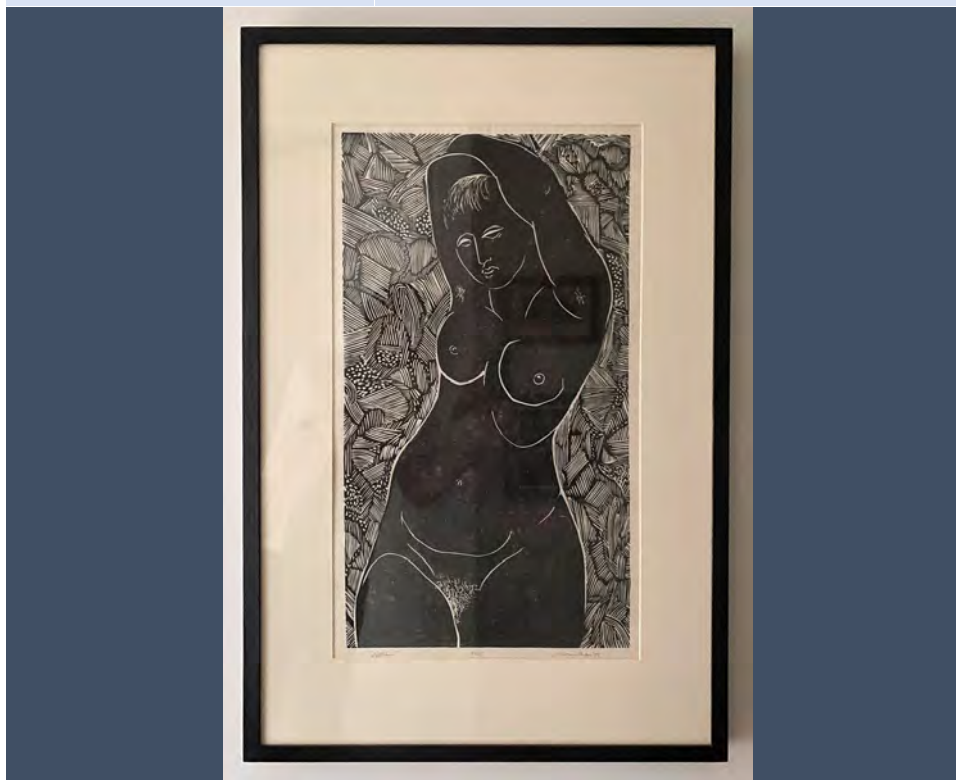
Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986
	
Artwork title	Still Life with Bottles
Year	1966
Medium	Painting: Oil on board
Edition	NA
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	57 x 69.5 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	Counihan Collection, Counihan Gallery, 23 July 2022 to 4 September 2022
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986




Artwork title	Cathedral
Year	1978
Medium	Print: Linocut
Edition	Artist Proof (edition of 50 + 3 Artist Proofs)
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	56 x 81.5 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	Counihan Collection, Counihan Gallery, 23 July 2022 to 4 September 2022
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan This print is also held in the National Gallery of Australia Collection.
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA


Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986



Artwork title	Jillian
Year	1978
Medium	Print: Linocut
Edition	15 of 25
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	70 x 105 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986
	
Artwork title	Mexican Girl
Year	1970
Medium	Print: Linocut
Edition	Artist Proof (edition of 120 + AP)
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	65 x 84 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counihan Collection, Counihan Gallery, 23 July 2022 to 4 September 2022 - Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist, Counihan Gallery, 10 October to 10 November 2002
Provenance (if applicable)	<p>Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan</p> <p>An edition of this print is already held in the Merri-bek Art Collection. It also features in other public collections including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Art Gallery of New South Wales - National Gallery of Victoria - Queensland Art Gallery
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA


Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986
	
Artwork title	Modern Man
Year	1965
Medium	Painting: Oil on board
Edition	NA
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	57 x 70 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986
	
Artwork title	Mother and Child
Year	1965
Medium	Painting: Oil on board
Edition	NA
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	71.5 x 87.5 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist, Counihan Gallery, 10 October to 10 November 2002
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

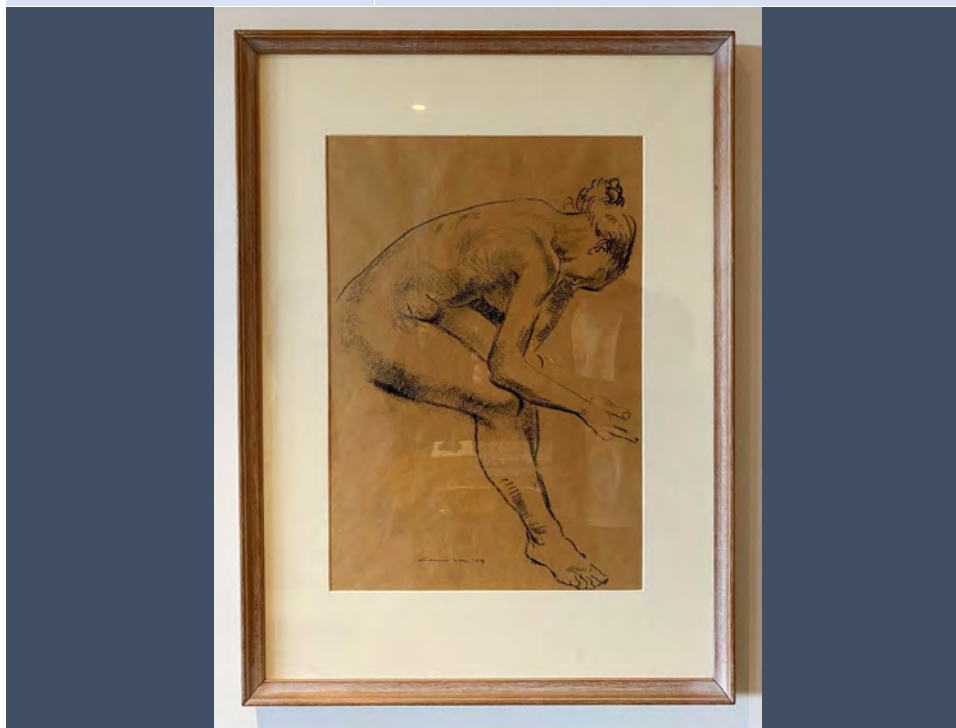
Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986



Artwork title	Old Woman and the Village
Year	1981
Medium	Painting: Oil on board
Edition	NA
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	48 x 43.5 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist, Counihan Gallery, 10 October to 10 November 2002
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986
	
Artwork title	Peace Means Life
Year	1959
Medium	Print: Linocut
Edition	22 of 50
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	51 x 73 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist, Counihan Gallery, 10 October to 10 November 2002
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan This print features in other public collections including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Gallery of Australia - National Gallery of Victoria - Art Gallery of New South Wales - City of Freemantle Art Collection - Queensland Art Gallery – Gallery of Modern Art
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986



Artwork title	Seated Nude
Year	1959
Medium	Drawing
Edition	NA
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	52 x 71 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	NA
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986



Back of work

Artwork title	Woman with Candle
Year	1972
Medium	Painting: Oil on board
Edition	NA
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	86 x 75 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist, Counihan Gallery, 10 October to 10 November 2002
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986



Artwork title	<i>In the Baths, Hotel Gellert, Budapest</i>
Year	1949
Medium	Drawing: Pencil and ink
Edition	NA
Dimensions <i>(height x width x depth in centimetres)</i>	16.5 x 20.5 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	NA
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Artist name	Noel Counihan
Year of birth	1913
Location of artist	Deceased 1986



Artwork title	Laughing Christ (indicative image)
Year	1970
Medium	Print: Linocut
Edition	Unknown
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	86 x 75 cm (framed)
Exhibition history	
Provenance (if applicable)	Collection of Edith L Bavin and Malcom Macmillan An edition of this print is also held in the Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection.
Condition	Excellent
Storage and conservation requirements	No framing or conservation required
Price (GST inclusive)	Donation – outright gift
Is GST applicable?	NA
Vendor	NA

Recommendation and Collection Relevance

This generous donation offer from a private collection includes 5 paintings, 7 prints and 2 drawings by Noel Counihan. It presents a rare opportunity to acquire a significant group of works with strong provenance, formed through the close personal relationship between the collector and the artist.

The donor, Edith L Bavin, is the wife of the late Malcolm Macmillan (1929–2024), a foundation member of the Department of Psychology at Monash University and an avid art collector. He was a friend of Noel Counihan, and the works proposed for acquisition were either purchased directly from Counihan or gifted by the artist. As a result, the collection contains several rare and important pieces.

Malcolm was also a friend of the Counihan Gallery, lending works from his collection for the exhibition *Noel Counihan: Artist as Activist*, which was held at the Gallery in 2002. It is written into Malcolm's will that his collection of Noel Counihan works be offered as a donation to the Merri-bek Art Collection. It is also requested as a condition of the donation that the collection remains intact and all works are accepted.

While the donation includes two prints already represented in the Collection, this duplication is not unusual in public collections. It is therefore recommended that the entire collection be acquired as a significant representation of Counihan's creative output across the breadth of his practice, which strengthens the holdings of his paintings and drawings within the Collection.

Selection criteria

The proposed acquisitions meet the following key acquisition criteria that form the Merri-bek Art Collection Policy 2024–2029.

A work that:

- A work that shows a distinctive and verifiable connection with the City of Merri-bek, such as being a work of art by an artist who has lived, worked, exhibited or contributed to the creative culture of Merri-bek
- A work that engages with important social, cultural or environmental issues
- A work that enhances the status and diversity of the Merri-bek Art Collection

Artwork significance

The proposed acquisition is particularly significant for its inclusion of several rare paintings, an aspect of Noel Counihan's practice that is less frequently represented in public collections than his prints.

An important work is *Mother and Child*, a painting of an Aboriginal woman embracing her child, which the artist created in the early 1960s following a visit to Swan Hill. This work forms part of a wider series in which the mother-and-child motif became a powerful symbol of humanity, resilience and care. The work also makes a broader political statement, asserting the presence, strength and continuity of Aboriginal families at a time of profound systemic injustice.

Together with *Woman with Candle*, *Modern Man*, *Still Life with Bottles* and *Old Woman at the Village*, these paintings demonstrate the breadth of Counihan's subject matter and stylistic approach, encompassing social commentary, portraiture, psychological studies and observational works grounded in everyday life. They also reflect the artist's sustained commitment to social commentary, humanism and political engagement, which is central to his significance within Australian art history. These themes extend across the drawings and prints included in this collection, notably the *Counihan-Linocuts 1959* series, works from which are held in major public collections throughout Australia.

As a prominent Australian artist who lived and worked in Merri-bek, Counihan holds an important place within the municipality's cultural history and the existing Merri-bek Art Collection. This acquisition would substantially strengthen the gallery's holdings of Counihan's work, particularly through the inclusion of rare paintings, while building on established print series already represented within the Collection.

Artist biography

Noel Counihan (1913–1986) was one of Australia's most influential socially engaged artists, known for his powerful depictions of working-class life, political struggle and human dignity. Working across painting, drawing and printmaking, Counihan developed a bold and expressive visual language that reflected his commitment to social justice and political activism.

Counihan first gained prominence during the 1930s through political cartoons and prints that addressed issues such as unemployment, poverty and workers' rights during the Great Depression. A committed activist and member of the Communist Party of Australia for much of his life, his art frequently addressed the struggles of ordinary people and advocated for social change. His work often depicted labourers, families, migrants and marginalised communities, reflecting his belief that art should engage directly with contemporary social realities.

Throughout his career, Counihan explored a wide range of themes including war and peace, inequality, and the resilience of everyday people. Series such as *Counihan–Linocuts 1959* demonstrate his mastery of printmaking and his ability to combine technical precision with strong political symbolism. His work also reflects personal and autobiographical subjects, including childhood memories and deeply empathetic portrayals of women and family life.

Counihan travelled internationally, including to Mexico and Europe, where he encountered revolutionary art movements and political muralism that further influenced his practice. Despite these international connections, his work remained grounded in the social realities of Australia.

Counihan lived and worked in Melbourne's northern suburbs, now part of Merri-bek, and his legacy continues through the Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, which was named in his honour. His works are held in major public collections across Australia and remain significant for their enduring humanism, political engagement and commitment to representing the lives of ordinary people.

References

Max Dimmack and Noel Counihan, *Noel Counihan*, Melbourne University Press, 1974.

Robert Smith, *Noel Counihan Prints 1931–1981: A Catalogue Raisonné*. Hale & Iremonger, 1981.

Janet McKenzie, *Noel Counihan*, Kangaroo Press, 1986.

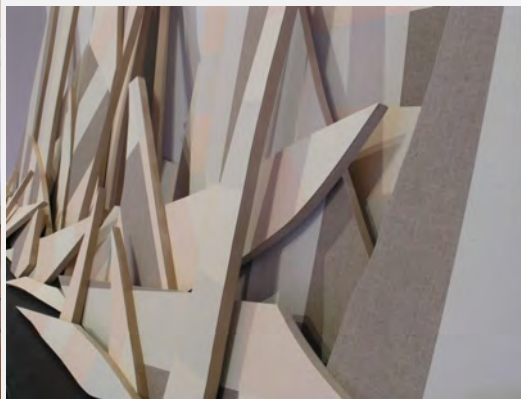
Roger Butler, *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary*, National Gallery of Victoria, 1998.

Alan McCulloch, *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, Aus Art Editions, 2006.

'Malcolm "Macmillan Obituary (2024) - the Age', Legacy.com, Legacy, 12 Aug. 2024, tributes.theage.com.au/au/obituaries/theage-au/name/malcolm-macmillan-obituary?id=57802372, accessed 21 March 2026.

Merri-bek Art Collection Donation Rationale 2024

Artist name	Chris Bond
Year of birth	b. 1975
Location of artist	Melbourne (Victoria, Australia)



Artwork title	Painting after Michelle's brain surgery Alternative title: Michelle's post brain surgery painting, shattered
Year	2007
Medium	Oil on linen on MDF
Dimensions (height x width x depth in centimetres)	37 pieces, dimensions variable
Exhibition history	Small Quiet Gestures, Linden, 2007.
Condition	To be advised, currently undergoing condition treatment by a conservator, as arranged by the donor.
Storage and conservation requirements	To be stored in the Counihan Gallery Collections Room. This work presents some storage difficulties based on the size and shape, as well as unique display considerations. In it's current state, a custom shelf and fixing would be required in order to display the work.
Donor	Olivia Poloni

Recommendation

The recommendation is to accept the donation from Olivia Poloni's private collection, *Painting after Michelle's brain surgery* (2007) by Chris Bond.

The artwork was created by Bond following his partner Michelle Guglielmo's fight with ovarian cancer. The proposed donation is significant to the Counihan Gallery's history, as Michelle (1975-2006) was a Gallery Assistant of the Counihan Gallery between 2000-2002 and the gallery's Curator between 2002-2006. Michelle Guglielmo was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2004 and passed away in 2006 at 31 years old.

Chris Bond is also a former Gallery Assistant at the Counihan Gallery, further strengthening the connection of the artwork to the Merri-bek City Council. As the Michelle Guglielmo Park on 260 Sydney Road is inaugurated, this timely donation strengthens the role of the Merri-bek Art Collection in representing community history. It also positions the Council as an organisation that recognises the contributions of residents and staff.

During her time as Gallery Curator, Michelle supported many emerging and established artists in Merri-bek. She was dedicated to making art accessible to the wider community and developed an innovative art program that engaged schools, community groups and Merri-bek residents. Through her work Michelle played a pivotal role in raising the profile of the Counihan Gallery within the Melbourne and Australian arts scene.

The proposed donation is a work originally commissioned by Linden Contemporary for Chris Bond's solo exhibition *Small Quiet Gestures* in 2007, which dealt with Michelle's illness and pregnancy, their relationship, and their son Alessio. *Painting after Michelle's brain surgery* (2007) possesses aesthetic qualities that Michelle particularly admired, and the accepted donation would complement the stylistic elements of Mandy Gunn's sculpture *Ways of Seeing* (2001), which was acquired by the Art Collection in 2007 to honour Michelle's achievements and her guidance, vision and commitment to Merri-bek.

Selection criteria

- Shows a distinctive and verifiable connection with the City of Merri-bek, such as being a work of art by an artist who has contributed to the creative culture of Merri-bek
- A work that enhances the status and diversity of the Merri-bek Art Collection
- A work that engages with important social, cultural or environmental issues
- An innovative artwork that reflects current trends within a broader context of contemporary Australian art
- An artwork that builds upon and strengthens the First Nations art component of the Merri-bek Art Collection, as per Council's Reconciliation Policy

Statement of significance

Chris Bond's *Painting after Michelle's brain surgery* (2007) resonates deeply with the history of Merri-bek City Council. Bond, a former Gallery Assistant at the Counihan Gallery, created this artwork following the passing of his partner, Michelle Guglielmo, who served as Gallery Assistant then Curator at the Counihan Gallery from 2000-2006.

The artwork, which is made up of an assemblage of painted MDF contains characteristics found in Op Art and Minimalism, both of which Michelle had an affinity for. According to Bond, Michelle particularly admired artists like Bridget Riley and Agnes Martin, whose works utilise repetitive and minimalist forms, which is reflected in Bond's painting. The recommended acquisition was proposed by Chris Bond in consultation with the Guglielmo family, who believed that the assemblage and experimental quality of the work would have appealed to Michelle.

Artist biography

Chris Bond is an Australian artist whose experimental multimedia practice plays with the evolving quality of identity, knowledge and perception, forming fictitious narratives that draw from archival and found materials. Bond has exhibited both nationally and internationally, with works in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Victoria, Bendigo Art Gallery, Geelong Gallery and the Archive of Humanist Art, amongst many others. Bond undertook a studio residency at Gertrude Contemporary in 2001 and obtained a PhD (Visual Art) from the University of Melbourne in 2018.

Selected exhibitions and awards:

Word of Mouth, 2019. Undisclosed locations, Venice.

Glimmer, 2019. Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Call, 2017. THIS IS NO FANTASY and Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Art Basel Hong Kong.

Archibald Prize, 2016. Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

New 08, 2008. ACCA, Melbourne.

Small Quiet Gestures, 2007. Linden Gallery, Melbourne.

Finalist, Adelaide Perry Prize for Drawing, 2018.

Winner, BalletLab MacMahon Contemporary Art Award, 2017.

Finalist, Archibald Prize, AGNSW, 2016.

Winner, Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, 2013.

References

[A Park Close to Home - 260 Sydney Rd Brunswick | Conversations Merri-bek](#)

Chris Bond, 2024. <https://chrisbond.com.au/>

Chris Bond, Archibald Prize AGNSW, 2016. [Chris Bond: The restless dead \(portrait of the artist\) :: Archibald Prize 2016 | Art Gallery of NSW](#)

[Michelle Guglielmo park is under construction! | A Park Close to Home - 260 Sydney Rd Brunswick | Conversations Merri-bek](#)

Purchase of Artwork in Memory of Former Gallery Curator Michelle Guglielmo, Council Report, 2007.

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Central Coburg Oversight Committee

Date: 25 March 2026

Meeting time: 4 pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Liz Irvin
Apologies	Cr Chris Miles Cr Helen Politis
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Bec Fitzgerald, Coburg Revitalisation Lead
External participants	Nil

Items discussed		Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1	Stakeholder matters	Nil	
2	Movement and access	Nil	
3	Feasibility modelling	Nil	
4	Coburg Library and Piazza update	Nil	

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Bec Fitzgerald, Coburg Revitalisation Lead

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Central Coburg Oversight Committee

Date: 22 April 2026

Meeting time: 4 pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Liz Irvin Cr Jay Iwasaki
Apologies	Cr Chris Miles Cr Helen Politis
Council Staff (name and position)	Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Bec Fitzgerald, Coburg Revitalisation Lead Peter Sagar, Program Director Central Coburg Lisa Dempster, Manager Cultural Development
External participants	Nil

	Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1	Coburg Library & Piazza update	Nil	
2	Stakeholder matters	Nil	
3	Intersection upgrades	Nil	
4	Parking baseline and parking shifts	Nil	
5	Integrated water management	Nil	
6	Summary of proposed changes to update the framework plan	Nil	

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Peter Sagar, Program Director Central Coburg

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Central Coburg Oversight Committee

Date: 29 April 2026

Meeting time: 4 pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Jay Iwasaki Cr Liz Irvin
Apologies	Cr Chris Miles Cr Helen Politis
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting CEO Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Peter Sagar, Program Director Central Coburg Seamus Lowe – Unit Manager Property Lisa Dempster, Manager Cultural Development
External participants	Nil

Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1 Community use objectives	Nil	

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Peter Sagar, Program Director Central Coburg

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Councillor Briefing

Date: 11 May 2026

Meeting time: 6.00pm – 6.22pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council most recently on 10 April 2024.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Chris Miles Cr Liz Irvin Cr Helen Politis Cr Ella Svensson Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor Cr Sue Bolton Cr Jay Iwasaki Cr Adam Pulford
Apologies	Cr Oscar Yildiz JP Cr Katerine Theodosis
Council Staff (name and position)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Greg Rodwell, Acting Director City Infrastructure Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Yvonne Callanan, Acting Director Business Transformation

Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1 Council Meeting Agenda, 13 May 2026	Nil.	-

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Yvonne Callanan, Acting Director Business Transformation

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Record of Meeting

Meeting: Councillor Briefing

Date: 18 May 2026

Meeting time: 6.02pm – 8.10pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council most recently on 10 April 2024.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Chris Miles Cr Liz Irvin Cr Helen Politis Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor Cr Sue Bolton Cr Jay Iwasaki Cr Ella Svensson
Apologies	Cr Oscar Yildiz JP Cr Adam Pulford Cr Katerine Theodosis
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Greg Rodwell, Acting Director City Infrastructure Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Pene Winlade, Director Place and Environment Yvonne Callanan, Acting Director Business Transformation Barry Hahn, Manager Early Years and Youth Christina Grayland, Acting Manager Community Wellbeing Catherine Dear, Manager City Services Victoria Hart, Manager Sustainability and Climate Julia Hardiman, Unit Manager Urban Design Caden McCarthy, Manager City Design and Economy Stefan Grun, Manager Customer, Communications and Engagement Peter Sagar, Program Director Central Coburg Seamus Lowe, Unit Manager Property
External participants	Head of Strategy, Bachar Houli Foundation Executive Director, Bachar Houli Foundation Director, Cox Architects Senior Associate, Cox Architects Project Director, Case Meallin Project Manager, Case Meallin

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Items discussed		Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1	Bachar Houli Foundation Islamic College of Sport and Aspire Sports Centre	Nil	
2	Fortnightly Rubbish	Nil	
3	Draft Places for People Plan and Post Office Place - Community Engagement Outcomes	Nil	
4	Quarterly Customer, Communications and Engagement Briefing	Nil	
5	Central Coburg – EOI	Nil	

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Yvonne Callanan, Acting Director Business Transformation

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Planning Briefing

Date: 25/05/2026

Meeting time: 6.00pm



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees		
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Jay Iwasaki Cr Helen Politis Cr Ella Svensson	Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor Cr Liz Irvin Cr Adam Pulford
Apologies	Cr Sue Bolton Cr Chris Miles	Cr Katerine Theodosis Cr Oscar Yildiz JP
Council Staff (name and position)	Pene Winslade – Director Place and Environment Phil Priest – Group Manager City Development Ryan Hay – Acting Unit Manager Urban Planning Aileen Chin – Planning Coordinator Sue Vujcevic – Acting CEO Eamonn Fennessy – Director Community Christina Grayland – Acting Manager Community Wellbeing	
External participants	Nil	

	Items discussed (list topics discuss, excluding welcome & next meeting)	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1	Aquatic Operator Transition	-	-
2	City Development Activity Report (MARCH QTR)	-	-
3	MPS/2026/49 - 19 MacKinnon Grove and 20 Patrick Street, Glenroy	-	-
4	MPS/2020/595/B and MPS/2023/201/A - 71, 88, 90 and 99 Grandview Avenue, Pascoe Vale South	-	-

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Phillip Priest, Group Manager City Development

Record of Meeting

Meeting: Councillor Briefing

Date: 1 June 2026

Meeting time: 6.00pm –



This Record is kept in accordance with the Governance Rules adopted by Council most recently on 10 April 2024.

Rule 9.1 provides that a record of the matters discussed at all **Hearing of Submission Meetings, Advisory Committee Meetings** and **Councillor Briefings** organised or hosted by Council will be kept.

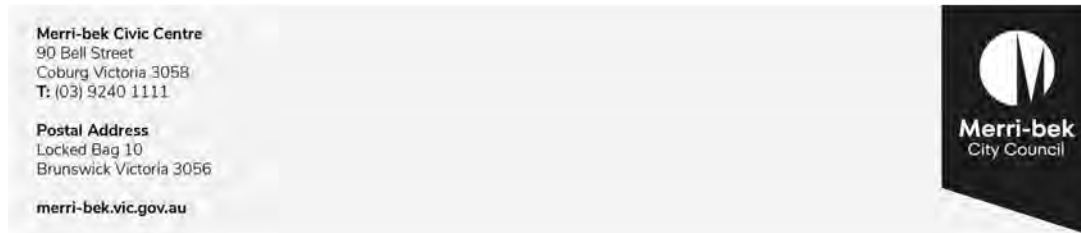
The record will include the attendees at the meeting, including the organisations represented by external presenters, the title of matters discussed and any conflicts of interest disclosed and whether the person with the conflict of interest left the meeting.

Attendees	
Councillors	Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor Cr Chris Miles Cr Liz Irvin Cr Ella Svensson Cr Adam Pulford Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor Cr Sue Bolton Cr Jay Iwasaki Cr Katerine Theodosis
Apologies	Cr Helen Politis
Council Staff (name and position)	Sue Vujcevic, Acting Chief Executive Officer Greg Rodwell, Acting Director City Infrastructure Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community Pene Winslade, Director Place and Environment Yvonne Callanan, Acting Director Business Transformation Jemma Wightman, Chief Financial Officer Indivar Dhakal, Manager Capital Works Planning and Delivery Riley Morton, Acting Management Accounting Coordinator Peter Sagar, Program Director Central Coburg Seamus Lowe, Unit Manager Property Victoria Hart, Manager Sustainability and Climate Robyn Mitchell, Unit Manager Sustainable Built Environment Sophie Barison, Acting Manager Governance and Strategy
External participants	Nil.

Items discussed	Conflict disclosed by, general or material and the nature	Left meeting
1 Budget briefing	Nil	
2 Central Coburg Final Framework	Nil	
3 Carbon Offsets	Nil	
4 Review of Councillor Support Expenses and Resources Policy	Nil	

This form is kept in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles and Merri-bek City Council's Privacy Policy and practices as stated on Merri-bek's [website](#).

Name and title of Council officer completing record: Yvonne Callanan, Acting Director Business Transformation



Doc. No. D26/133805
XRef.: D26/107873

Elizabeth Smith
[REDACTED]

Dear Elizabeth,

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM MARCH 2026 COUNCIL MEETING

I write to you in response to your questions submitted to the 11 March 2026 Council meeting, as follows:

Question 1

Why is a club with 17 teams, including 13 junior teams and dedicated girls and women's programs, being forced to split operations across two venues while a seniors-only club with just three teams occupies the adjacent oval at minimal capacity?

Question 2

Will Council commit to reviewing this 2026 winter oval decision and reallocating usage at JP Fawkner Reserve West so that ground access reflects actual participation levels rather than historical allocations?

Council understands the concern raised regarding why one club may operate across multiple venues while another appears to have lower levels of use at an adjacent ground. Sportsground allocation is not determined solely by the number of teams at a venue and instead requires balancing a range of considerations across the municipality.

Council works directly with club representatives each year to develop seasonal allocations for more than 40 winter sporting clubs. In doing so, officers consider participation levels across junior and senior programs, growth in girls' and women's sport, facility capacity, scheduling requirements, shared use opportunities, equity of access, and importantly, ground condition and sustainable levels of use. Managing the intensity of use on sportsgrounds is necessary to maintain safe and playable conditions across the season and reduce long-term deterioration of facilities.

Following the Council meeting, officers met directly with representatives from Oak Park Football Club to review the allocation arrangements and discuss opportunities to support the club's operational requirements. As part of these discussions, Oak Park Football Club also requested access to JP Fawkner West, and this additional use is now occurring.

Council also recognises the importance of improving capacity at these sites into the future. JP Fawkner West and JP Fawkner East are currently identified within Council's next five-year capital works program for upgrades aimed at increasing the carrying capacity and intensity of use across both grounds, helping to support growing participation and improve long-term access outcomes for clubs.

Council will continue to work collaboratively with clubs to review allocations annually and respond to changing participation and facility demands over time.

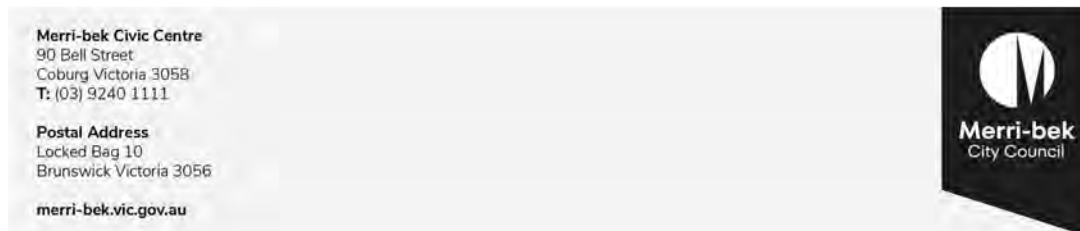
I trust this answers your questions, however if you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact Christina Grayland, Manager Community Wellbeing on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Eamonn Fennessy
DIRECTOR COMMUNITY

02/6/2026



Doc. No. D26/133826
XRef.: D26/120583

Rodel Cachuela
[REDACTED]

Dear Rodel,

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM MARCH 2026 COUNCIL MEETING

I write to you in response to your question submitted to the 11 March 2026 Council meeting, as follows:

On what basis was Oak Park Football Club not allocated access to JP Fawkner Reserve West or the ovals at Oak Park Reserve, both of which have demonstrated capacity (are not in use most of the time) and are within walking distance of the community it serves?

Council's sporting ground allocations are undertaken through an annual seasonal allocation process and are guided by Council's Sporting Ground Allocation Policy, which seeks to balance equitable access, participation needs, facility capacity, scheduling requirements, ground condition and sustainable levels of use across the municipality.

In preparation for the 2026 winter season, Recreation officers met with representatives from Oak Park Football Club during November and December 2025 to discuss the club's training requirements and identify options to support continued participation growth. Officers also met with the President of Oak Park Junior Football Club in late January and continued discussions with the club ahead of seasonal allocations closing.

As part of these discussions, officers identified a number of potential options for additional training space, including Oak Park West, JP Fawkner West and ATC Cook on various training nights, in addition to the club's existing use of JP Fawkner East. These options were subsequently included by the club in its initial application through the seasonal ground allocation process.

Following further discussions regarding availability, operational requirements and preferred training arrangements, Oak Park Football Club elected not to proceed with use of Oak Park West and JP Fawkner West at that time and instead confirmed a preference to utilise ATC Cook for additional training nights. The proposed allocation arrangement was confirmed with the club on 18 February 2026, pending Council approval through the seasonal allocation report.

Following the Council meeting, officers again met with Oak Park Football Club representatives to review the allocation arrangements and discuss current and future needs. Through this process, the club subsequently requested access to JP Fawkner West and this additional use is now occurring. While there may be periods where grounds appear underutilised, allocations are not based solely on visible occupancy. Council also manages intensity of use and ground condition to maintain safe, playable surfaces across the season and support long-term asset performance.

Council recognises the growing demand for sports participation and has identified both JP Fawkner West and JP Fawkner East within the next five-year capital works program for upgrades. These improvements are intended to increase carrying capacity and support greater intensity of use across both grounds into the future. Council continues to work directly with club representatives each year across more than 40 winter sporting clubs to review allocations and respond to changing participation and facility demands.

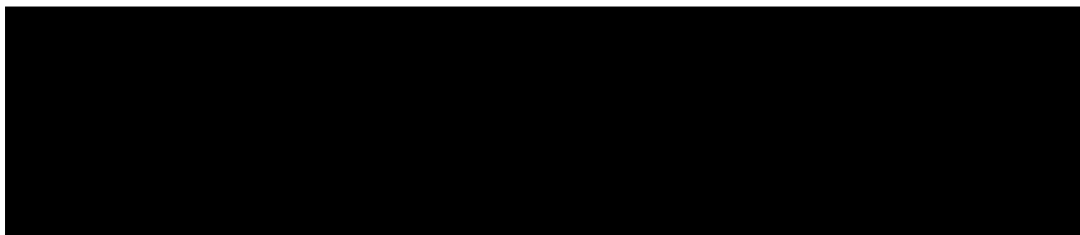
I trust this answers your question, however if you require any further information, please don't hesitate contact Christina Grayland, Manager Community Wellbeing on [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Eamonn Fennessy
DIRECTOR COMMUNITY

02/6/2026



Doc. No. D26/133842
XRef.: D26/120620

Julian Lamont

Dear Julian,

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM MARCH 2026 COUNCIL MEETING

I write to you in response to your question submitted to the 11 March 2026 Council meeting, as follows:

Does Council believe it is reasonable for a junior community club to operate across two venues 10 minutes (driving) apart when the neighbouring oval is not fully used and is allocated to a club that only has 3 senior teams in 2025?

Council recognises that operating across more than one venue can create additional challenges for clubs, particularly where junior participation and family logistics are involved. However, sporting ground allocations are not determined solely by the number of teams at a venue or by whether a ground appears underutilised at particular times.

Council allocates sporting grounds each season in accordance with its Sporting Ground Allocation Policy and works directly with club representatives across more than 40 winter sporting clubs to balance a range of considerations. These include participation levels across junior and senior programs, growth in girls' and women's sport, scheduling requirements, facility capacity, equitable access, shared use opportunities, and importantly, ground condition and sustainable intensity of use to maintain safe and playable surfaces across the season.

In preparation for the 2026 season, Recreation officers met with representatives from Oak Park Football Club during November and December 2025 and again with the President of Oak Park Junior Football Club in late January to discuss the club's training needs and identify suitable allocation options. Through this process, officers identified a number of options for additional training capacity, including Oak Park West, JP Fawkner West and ATC Cook on various nights alongside the club's existing use of JP Fawkner East. These options were included by the club in its initial application through the seasonal allocation process.

Following further discussions regarding availability and preferred operating arrangements, the club elected not to proceed with Oak Park West and JP Fawkner West at that time and instead confirmed a preference to utilise ATC Cook for additional training nights.

Following the Council meeting, officers met again with Oak Park Football Club representatives to review the allocation arrangements and discuss current needs. Through these discussions, the club subsequently requested access to JP Fawkner West and this additional use is now occurring. Council also recognises the need to increase capacity at these facilities over time. Both JP Fawkner West and JP Fawkner East are currently identified within Council's next five-year capital works program for upgrades aimed at increasing carrying capacity and supporting greater intensity of use across both grounds into the future.

Council will continue to review allocations annually and work collaboratively with clubs to respond to changing participation and facility demands.

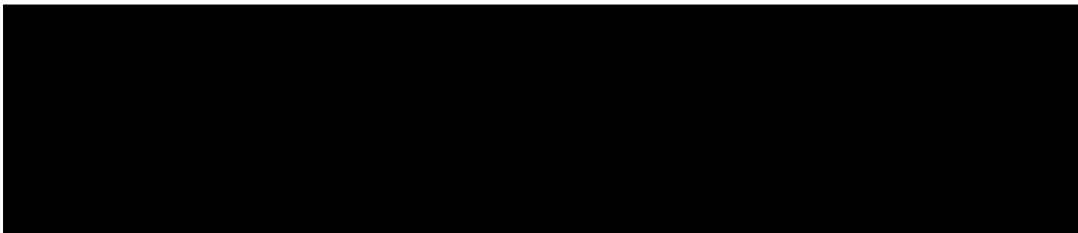
I trust this answers your question, however if you require any further information, please don't hesitate contact Christina Grayland, Manager Community Wellbeing on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Eamonn Fennessy
DIRECTOR COMMUNITY

02/06/2026



Doc. No. D26/193291
XRef.: D26/161544

Marcus Belmore


Dear Marcus,

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME ON NOTICE RESPONSE FROM APRIL 2026 COUNCIL MEETING

I write to you in response to your question submitted to the 8 April 2026 Council meeting, as follows:

Question 1

With the Council action to close the Radicle Roots Community Garden for soil testing, will Council allow the community to maintain the garden with weeding and watering? What is being done to tackle root causes of contamination in food and everyday life?

Council understands the disruption and concern caused by the temporary closure of the Radicle Roots Community Garden while soil and produce testing was undertaken.

During the testing period, access arrangements were managed in line with the need to preserve site conditions and ensure the testing process could be completed appropriately. Now that testing has concluded indicating that vegetables grown at the garden are considered low risk for consumption, as such the garden reopened on 5 May 2026, the focus has shifted to supporting the continued use and care of the garden in a way that reflects the findings and any recommended ongoing management practices.

Council received the second stage testing results and met with the group to discuss the findings and next steps. The assessment identified no detectable contamination in the sampled produce, indicating that vegetables grown at the garden are considered low risk for consumption. The report also included recommendations for both Council and the group to consider to help manage any potential risks into the future.

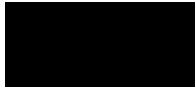
In response, Council is working directly with the group to review these recommendations and establish practical, longer-term arrangements for the garden's operation and maintenance. This includes discussions to formalise an ongoing arrangement with Guerrilla Gardening Naarm and support sustainable management of the site.

More broadly, Council recognises that concerns about contamination in food and everyday environments extend beyond a single site. While many sources of environmental contamination sit

outside local government control, Council can play a role through land management practices, environmental health oversight, advocacy to other levels of government, evidence-based testing where concerns arise, and supporting community education and risk reduction measures. The recent testing process and follow-up actions are intended to ensure decisions are informed by evidence and to support safe community use of the garden into the future.

I trust this answers your questions, however if you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact Christina Grayland, Manager Community Wellbeing on [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Eamonn Fennessy
DIRECTOR COMMUNITY

02/06/2026



Date Authorised by Council:	10 June 2026
Commencement Date:	10 June 2026
Review Date (4 years from authorised date):	10 June 2026
Responsible Department:	Business Transformation
Authorisation Reference:	<insert CM document reference>

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1. Introduction

This Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy establishes the facilities, resources and support necessary or appropriate to provide to Councillors in the performance of their duties as elected representatives.

This includes:

- Outlining Councillors' entitlements for reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses incurred while performing the duties of a Councillor;
- Establishing Councillors' support, resources and equipment entitlements associated with performing the duties of a Councillor;
- Establishing Councillors' entitlements to paid professional development;
- Providing guidelines on the process for Council to sell Council supplied IT equipment to Councillors who leave office; and
- Specifying procedures to be followed in applying for reimbursement and in reimbursing expenses;

In the event Council establishes a Delegated Committee the provisions of this Policy relating to the reimbursement of expenses will apply to a member who is not a Councillor (if any), as if they were a Councillor.

The Policy also outlines the processes for reporting to the community on the costs of resourcing and supporting Councillors, to promote good governance, transparency and accountability

2. Context

2.1 Alignment

Where duties performed are necessary or appropriate for the purposes of achieving the objectives of Council, having regard to any relevant Act, Regulations, Ministerial Guidelines and Council policies, Councillors are entitled to access facilities, support and resources as described in this Policy and the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act).

The provision of facilities, resources and support to Councillors, and the expenses paid or reimbursed, will be consistent with the following principles:

- Encouraging diversity in participation, equity and access;
- Accountability and transparency; and
- No disadvantage.

Mayor and Councillor allowances are provided separately to reimbursements of expenses and the provision of facilities/resources support.

2.2 Organisational Context

The duties and activities considered to be necessary or appropriate for the purposes of achieving the objectives of a Council include, but are not limited to:

- Attending ordinary and special Council meetings, meetings of committees of Council, Councillor Briefing sessions organised by the Chief Executive Officer or delegate and civic or ceremonial functions convened by the Council, the Mayor or the Chief Executive Officer;
- Attending meetings or workshops scheduled by the Council, the Mayor or the Chief Executive Officer;
- Attending community meetings and Ward Councillor meetings;
- Participating in site inspections or meetings, or participating in delegations or deputations to which the Councillor has been duly appointed as a representative of Council or relevant to a matter which is, or is anticipated to be the subject of a decision of Council;
- Attending a meeting or function as the nominated representative of Council or the Mayor;
- Attending meetings of community groups, organisations and statutory authorities to which the Councillor has been appointed Council delegate or the nominated representative of Council;
- Attending discussions with officers or any person, on any matter relating to the City; and
- Attending seminars, training, conferences or professional development courses as an attendee, speaker or Council's nominated representative or delegate, which:
 - Contribute to the development of personal and professional skills or knowledge of the Councillor which are necessary for the performance of the duties of a Councillor;
 - Are consistent with Council's objectives;
 - Will cover or present material with application, importance or relevance to current or future issues faced by the Council;
 - Are within the Mayor and Councillors' approved budget for conferences and seminars.
- Council's nominated representative for attendance at conferences, seminars, training or professional development, includes appointed 'Councillor Responsible for' to a related portfolio and/or appointed committee member if that appointment has been made by Council.
- Support or reimbursement will not be provided if the costs:
 - Relate to a cost or expense (or portion thereof) which should reasonably be borne by another entity, or for which another entity is reasonably liable, or is outside the scope of this Policy; or

- Relate to expenses of a personal nature or which are not related to the business of Council.

The procedure and provisions for the reimbursement of expenses applies to members of Delegated Committees for expenses incurred in the course of their role as a Delegated Committee member, regardless of whether or not they are a Councillor.

2.3 Research and other drivers

Under the Act:

- Councillors are entitled to resources and facilities support and reimbursements of expenses related to their duties as a Councillor; and
- A Council must adopt and maintain a policy in relation to the reimbursement of expenses for Councillors and members of Delegated Committees.
- Council must make available the resources and facilities reasonably necessary to enable them to effectively perform their role.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to ensure the transparent and responsible provision of resources and support required by a Councillor to effectively undertake their duties as an elected representative by:

- Outlining the level of support to be provided;
- Maximising the value of seminar, conference and/or course attendance;
- Providing the approval processes for resources and support, including all interstate and overseas travel by Councillors in an official capacity;
- Providing for the provision of reasonable costs of childcare to be reimbursed, in order to support a Councillor to perform their role;
- Providing for expenses incurred by a Councillor who is a carer in a care relationship within the meaning of section 4 of the Carers Recognition Act 2012 to be reimbursed in order to support them to perform their role;
- Outlining the procedure for reimbursement of expenses; and
- Providing reporting mechanisms that are available to the community, including maintaining registers required by the Act or regulations and in accordance with the Public Transparency Policy.

4. Policy details

Councillors and members of delegated committees will be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses that are:

- bona fide expenses; and
- have been reasonably incurred in the performance of the role of Councillor and
- are reasonably necessary for the councillor and member of a delegated committee to perform this role.

Similarly, Councillors will be provided with the resources, facilities and support reasonably required for them to be effective in their role.

The entitlement to the support, resources and expenses outlined in the Policy will be assessed in accordance with the Policy Scope, Context and Objectives and in line with the approval process outlined.

This Policy is not intended to prescribe for every possible situation that may arise.

Should a situation arise that is not adequately covered by this Policy, the matter will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer who may refer it to Council for determination by resolution.

The Policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant Council policies adopted from time to time, including but not limited to, the Councillor Code of Conduct and specific policies regarding the use, security and maintenance and Council equipment, as adopted and or amended from time to time.

Unless otherwise specifically stated, where the Policy makes provision for Council to pay for a resource or expense, that resource or expense may be reimbursed as an out of pocket expense or, where the policy makes provision for reimbursement of an expense, that resource or expense may be paid by Council without the Councillor first incurring the expense. In both situations, the approval processes outlined in this policy will apply.

4.1 Resources and Facilities Support

4.1.1 Administrative Support

The Chief Executive Officer shall provide an appropriate level of administrative support for the Mayor and Councillors.

The level of administrative support shall be determined by the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Mayor.

Councillors are provided with a security card enabling appropriate access to Council venues.

4.1.2 Councillor Portal (Councillor Connect)

A Councillor Portal providing access to:

- Council business papers (Meeting Agendas and Minutes, Councillor Briefing Presentations);
- Correspondence directed to multiple Councillors or the Council;
- Information about projects and achievements of Council's operations;
- Policies and resource materials (including reference material and reports from other agencies or organisations);
- News items relevant to Council;
- Forms relevant for Councillors;
- Any other information considered relevant or necessary by the Chief Executive Officer or delegate; and

This will be the primary resource portal for Council business papers and key information for

Councillors.

4.1.3 Equipment and stationery

Council shall, upon request, provide Councillors with standard stationery, equipment and consumables held or obtained generally for the organisation's requirements, including, but not necessarily limited to, paper, writing implements, diaries, writing pads, printer cartridges, envelopes and the like. Council letterhead will only be provided for correspondence that has been approved by Council or for the Mayor to correspond as Council's official spokesperson.

Requests for stationery should be made to the Executive Assistant to Mayor and Councillors.

Each Councillor will be provided with personalised business cards and a name badge for use while on Council business.

4.1.4 Printing and copying

The resources provided for Councillors to print and copy items are outlined in the IT Equipment and Stationary sections in this policy.

Any requests for bulk copying or printing (more than 10 copies of a document that is more than 20 pages in length) must be determined by resolution of Council with consideration of the relevance to the Council Plan and Council's objectives. Printing to promote the activities of an individual Councillor or Ward Councillors may only be approved if it is part of the Communications Strategy or Communications unit workplan.

On request and subject to availability, Councillors will be provided with copies of brochures, flyers or reports to distribute in the course of their duties, if these have been produced as part of Council's usual operations.

4.1.5 Mayor's office, Councillors' office and meeting room

A suitably equipped Mayoral office shall be provided within the Council offices.

A Councillors' office and meeting room will be provided for use by Councillors within the Council offices, suitably equipped for computer access, office work, photocopying, reading, research, and meetings.

The space and equipment provided for the Mayoral Office and Councillors' office and meeting room provided shall be at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer.

4.1.6 Parking

Car parking will be available at the Civic Centre, subject to parking restrictions.

Councillors are eligible for a 'staff' parking permit, which allows permit holders to park in designated areas:

- the signed areas of the Merri-bek Civic Centre car park;
- David Street Brunswick carpark behind the Mechanics Institute, and
- Belair Avenue Glenroy car park.

When parking in a staff parking area, Councillors must clearly display a current permit in the bottom left-hand corner of the windscreen and only park in a designated staff parking permit area.

Infringements may be issued if a current permit is not displayed, not clearly visible, or if parked

in an incorrect permit area. Parking permits do not exempt a Councillor from all other road (parking) rules.

4.1.7 Meals and Refreshments

Where Council meetings, functions or events are held at times that extend through normal meal times, Council will provide suitable meals for Councillors.

4.1.8 Website

Each Councillor will be provided with a page on Council's website, the content of which may include a photograph, contact details, ward map, personal statements, hobbies and interests, Councillor assignments (areas of responsibility or appointments by Council to Committees), academic qualifications and professional memberships.

This information will be limited during the election (caretaker) period leading up to the Council election.

Additional information may be included on the Councillor's webpage at the Councillor's request, subject to the content being approved for publication by the Chief Executive Officer.

4.2 IT Equipment

Councillors are issued with IT equipment, meeting Council's IT standards, in order to facilitate Council-related communications between the community, Council staff and Councillors.

Councillors may choose to be supplied with the standard equipment or elect to purchase their own units (non-standard with no IT Support) and be reimbursed for equipment up to the same value of the equivalent standard equipment.

IT may support software that is not a Merri-bek approved application, however consideration will be given to cyber security risk and safeguarding Council's network infrastructure.

Where Council reimburses a Councillor for non-consumable IT equipment, the equipment becomes the property of Council and must be returned at the end of the Council term.

Equipment, software, service and facilities offered includes:

- mobile telephone and Bluetooth wireless adaptor (for Councillors' private vehicles that do not support Bluetooth);
- a tablet/laptop device;
- Windows/OS and MS Office (via Microsoft 365) amongst others will be installed on the device;
- cloud-based data storage (Microsoft 365);
- multi-function unit for printing, photocopying and scanning documents;
- Mobile phone voicemail; and
- IT support.

Mobile telephones and devices will all have wireless broadband capability and be Mobile internet enabled (e.g. 5G access).

4.2.1 Use of IT equipment

Council phones and mobile data enabled devices will be provided to support a Councillor to

undertake their duties, however, it is recognised that for practical reasons, a Councillor may make a reasonable number of non-Council related calls. They may also make reasonable personal use of mobile devices, including mobile data.

Councillor expenses will be monitored by the Manager Governance and Strategy and if a Councillor exceeds the data plan month for use of data or calls on their mobile devices, reimbursement of those costs will be sought from the Councillor.

If the amount exceeded relates to costs incurred as a result of higher-than-expected Council business, Councillors will be required to put this in writing to the Manager Governance and Strategy to acquit this matter. If the costs incurred are for non-Council business use, the amount of non-Council business use must be reimbursed to Council. The Manager Governance and Strategy will raise an invoice for the amount and the Councillor must pay this in line with Council's payment terms.

International calls will not be considered reasonable use, unless a Councillor is conducting Council business (such as making arrangements for a conference/tour that has been approved by a resolution of Council). Telephone calls to information service providers which incur a significant per minute charge will normally not be considered reasonable use.

App store purchases will not be covered by Council and must be reimbursed by Councillors.

4.2.2 Global roaming

When travelling overseas for personal reasons, Councillors may request activation of global roaming on their Council-provided devices to enable remote attendance at Council meetings. When Councillors request global roaming for personal use, they will be invoiced for all costs incurred for this period.

4.2.3 Damaged equipment

Equipment provided to a Councillor should remain in service for the full Council term. If equipment is damaged more than twice, the equipment will be replaced at the Councillor's cost.

4.2.4 Return of equipment

If a Councillor is suspended in accordance with the Act, the Councillor must return all Council equipment and materials to the Council at the beginning of the term of suspension.

In the case that a Councillor seeks a leave of absence, they will not be required to return their Council provided equipment, unless specifically requested by a vote of Council, where the reason for the leave meets the definition of a conflict of interest with that person's role as Councillor.

4.2.5 End of Council term or resignation/retirement of a Councillor

Councillors who leave office and who wish to retain the IT equipment provided by Council may do so by purchasing the equipment, otherwise all equipment must be returned to Council.

Equipment will be sold to retiring Councillors based on the value of the equipment at that time. The valuation will be arranged by the Unit Manager ICT Infrastructure.

A retiring Councillor who does not wish to purchase the equipment but wishes to retain their mobile telephone number may have the number ported to a personal mobile phone account at no cost.

Council provided IT support will cease to Councillors from the time of going out of office. Former Councillors may engage an IT support provider at their own cost if they choose.

Subscription services will also cease at the time of a Councillor's resignation or retirement from office. If Councillors do not intend to maintain a Microsoft 365 account (Microsoft Office and online storage), arrangements should be made with the IT support provider to transfer data to another storage provider or locally on the device.

4.3 Meetings arranged by Councillors

4.3.1 Meeting Rooms

Subject to availability, and in accordance with relevant policy, Council meeting/function rooms owned and controlled by Council may be booked by Councillors for use free of charge for meetings and other functions, provided the Councillor is in attendance and the use is necessary or appropriate for performing the duties of a Councillor or the conduct of Council business. Councillors must make these bookings via booking form.

Any non-Council venue booked directly by a Councillors for any purpose, must be done at their own cost and will not be reimbursed.

Ward or Councillor meetings should be held in Council owned venues to avoid hall hire costs. Officer support is provided to Councillors for their meetings in regard to booking the venue, and scheduling dates in the Councillors diary. The Civic & CEO Office will also organise a catering pack (tea and coffee) on request.

The Councillor will need to set up the venue, organise any catering and pick up the keys to the venue as required. IT support or equipment and/or copying of materials is not available for meetings arranged by Councillors.

Councillors must not permit or provide access to community members to secure parts of Council offices unless a Council officer is present.

4.3.2 Ward meetings

A Ward meeting is a meeting called by a Councillor to provide an opportunity for constituents to come and talk to their Councillor(s) about a range of Ward based and municipality-based issues. A Ward meeting is held in the Ward that the Councillor(s) represents and will usually have an open or broad invitation.

It is the Councillor's decision as to the format, date and location of the meeting.

Issues arising from Ward meetings should be communicated in writing by Ward Councillors to the Executive Officer Civic and CEO Office. These items will be raised and processed as customer requests/complaints (CRSs) in the Customer Request System.

On request, ward meetings can be promoted on Council's Website and through Council's standard communication/social media channels).

4.3.3 Councillor Meetings

A Councillor Meeting is a meeting called by a Councillor(s), that may be Ward related but is in relation to a specific topic with specific invitees. Councillor Meetings are not supported by Council officers, other than the booking of Council facilities which may be made by Mayor and Councillor support staff. A catering pack may also be made available. No IT support is available. Catering is at a Councillors own cost and will not be reimbursed.

4.3.4 Meet the Mayor meetings

Meet the Mayor meetings can be held in any ward in the municipality.

4.4 Advanced Approval to Travel Interstate or Overseas

4.4.1 Requests to travel

- a) It is recommended that a maximum of two Councillors attend the same event for any interstate or overseas conference, workshop, seminar etc.
- b) Approval for all interstate and overseas travel by a Councillor/s should be by resolution of the Council via a Council report. The Council report must identify the following:
 - background;
 - the purpose of the travel;
 - how the travel meets Council's objectives in line with the Council Plan;
 - the benefits to Council and/or Merri-bek;
 - proposed costs (airfare, accommodation, conference fees, meals, etc); and
 - nomination of the Councillor/s that should undertake such travel.
- c) A Councillor seeking approval for interstate or overseas travel other than attendance at the Australian Local Governments' (ALGA) National General Assembly, must provide the substantive information for the Council Report.

4.4.2 Exceptions

With the exception of overseas travel, in the event that timeframes do not permit approval in advance (e.g., arranging a meeting with a member of parliament), approval for interstate travel can be sought from the Chief Executive Officer after consulting with the Mayor.

4.4.3 Unofficial Overseas Travel

Councillors cannot represent the Council during personal overseas trips without prior approval through a Council resolution.

4.5 Travel and Accommodation

4.5.1 Air Travel

Where air travel is approved (as outlined under 4.4 of this Policy) flights are to be economy class flights utilising non-flexible fares where possible (when travel times can be assured). When selecting flights, consideration should be made to adjusting schedules to take advantage of cheaper options. The best price and conditions when booking flights will be sourced, irrespective of a Councillor's frequent flyer memberships.

Travel to conferences must depart from Melbourne.

4.5.2 Public Transport, taxis and rideshare schemes

Councillors may use public transport, taxis or rideshare services to undertake their Councillor duties. Receipts must be provided which will be reimbursed by Council.

Where Council provides a Myki (or similar public transport card), subscription to a rideshare service, cabcharge or any access to any other service that directly invoices Council, these

invoices will be compared to Councillor diary entries to identify correlations to Councillor duties. Where there is no apparent connection, the Councillor will be required to acquit for the use of the service in connection with their duties as a Councillor or reimburse the amount not related to Council business.

Myki

On request, a Councillor will be provided with a Myki card for use in Victoria. Any personal use must be reimbursed to Council.

If a Councillor uses their own Myki card, they will be reimbursed for use related to undertaking office on the provision of a Myki statement highlighting the relevant trip(s) for reimbursement and the reasons for the trip(s) in accordance with the reimbursement process under 4.17.

Cabcharge

Council, on request, will provide a Councillor with a Cabcharge digital fastcard for Council business use.

Taxis should only be used if they are the most efficient means of transport available.

Rideshare

A Councillor may choose to use a rideshare service to undertake their duties. Councillors may submit receipts for reimbursements in accordance with the reimbursement process under 4.17.

4.5.3 Mayoral vehicle

The Mayor will have access to a fully maintained vehicle (including service, fuel and insurance) or bicycle in accordance with Council Policy.

The vehicle will be available for use by the Mayor in the discharge of his or her duties as the Mayor and a Councillor, and for reasonable private use during the Mayoral term.

If the Mayor chooses the option of a bicycle, including an electric bicycle, instead of a motor vehicle:

- The make and model of the bicycle will be determined in consultation with the Director City Infrastructure; and
- If requested, a membership to a car sharing service, will be provided for the period they are Mayor, with costs associated with the membership paid by Council.

4.5.4 Accommodation

Where Councillors attend a conference, event or function that is held over more than one day, accommodation will be provided on conference nights. For example, should a conference, event or function commence on a Friday afternoon and finish on Sunday at 12 noon, accommodation will be provided for the Friday and Saturday nights only.

Accommodation will be provided for the night before the commencement of the conference providing the conference commences prior to 12 noon. Where the conference, event or function commences after 12 noon it is expected that Councillors will travel on the morning of the conference, event or function.

Any additional costs incurred as a result of extended stays, the attendance of partners and/or children and the cost of non-essential room extras such as mini bar or in-house movies shall be

borne by Councillors.

Practical judgment will be exercised when selecting accommodation that best suits a Councillor circumstance. Cost implications, risk and the best use of time will be considered. As a general guide, the maximum daily rate for accommodation is \$230 per night (subject to an annual update, where required, to be approved by the CEO for the life of the policy), but may be exceeded when:

- visiting a capital city; or
- staying at the venue where the conference, event or function is being held.

Note: Peak periods will be considered when enforcing this policy such as, accommodation costs during a major event such as Sydney Mardi Gras.

4.5.5 Food and drinks

Council will reimburse Councillors for meals when attending conferences, events, and functions that are work related. Council will not reimburse the purchase of alcohol at any time, unless pre-approved by the CEO.

4.5.6 Passport and visas

Councillors travelling overseas must ensure that they hold a current passport with a minimum of 6 months remaining validity and obtain any required visas. Costs for visas can be paid or reimbursed by the Council. However, costs associated with obtaining a current passport are the responsibility of the individual Councillor.

4.5.7 Non-Allowable Expenditure

Council will not reimburse expenditure in relation to the following items:

- Alcohol (unless pre-approved by the CEO);
- Snacks;
- Any costs associated with accommodation that are outside room and breakfast (e.g. mini bar, laundry, tips and gratuities);
- Airline club fees;
- Excess baggage claims;
- Toiletries;
- Any items lost or stolen;
- Tourism related costs (e.g.: day trips, excursions, activities, hire of bikes or boats etc);
- Reading materials (including newspapers, magazines, books etc);
- Traffic, parking or speeding fines;
- Travel costs not associated with the conference or event;
- In-flight or in-house movies or entertainment costs;
- Personal gifts, goods, services or souvenirs purchased; and

- Costs incurred for family or other persons travelling with Councillors (including meals, travel, incidentals etc).

4.6 Professional development

Professional development programs/courses are available to all Councillors.

4.6.1 Induction

Upon the commencement of each electoral term, an induction program will be provided to all Councillors. Costs relating to this program will not be deducted from the Councillors allotted budget and will not be attributed to an individual Councillor's expense (and therefore are not required to be included quarterly individual Councillor expense reports).

The costs of the Councillor induction program and group training recommended or mandatory for all Councillors will be maintained in a register and included in the annual report and reported as required.

4.6.2 Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD);

If a Councillor elects to attend the AICD Company Directors course and has approval to attend by a resolution of Council, the cost of attendance will not contribute to, or affect the Councillors allocation of \$10,000 per Council term for their attendance at seminars, conferences, training and community events.

Councillors attending the AICD Company Directors course are required to complete the accreditation (assignment and exam). A Councillor who does not complete the accreditation will be required to refund the cost.

4.6.3 Other Professional Development

Councillors may attend conferences, seminars, forums, delegations, training programs or similar events where participation is considered to support their role and responsibilities as elected representatives of Merri-bek City Council. Attendance should demonstrate one or more of the following outcomes:

- Enhances Councillors' knowledge and understanding of current and emerging issues to support informed decision-making and effective governance;
- Enables Councillors to represent Council's position and contribute to sector, regional or collaborative policy discussions;
- Meets community expectations for appropriate Councillor representation and engagement on matters of relevance to Merri-bek;
- Supports Councillor professional development in areas aligned with Council's strategic priorities, the Council Plan and good governance obligations; or
- Contributes to improved social, environmental, cultural, economic or built environment outcomes for the Merri-bek community.

4.7 Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly

With approval by Council resolution, Councillors may attend the Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly (Canberra) at Council expense in accordance with a rotation model determined by Councillors, designed to provide fair and equitable access across the Council term.

The rotation model must:

- aim to ensure each Councillor has a reasonable opportunity to attend once per Council term; and
- take into account previous attendance, term length, and equitable distribution of opportunities.

Additional Council-funded attendance outside the agreed rotation may be approved by Council resolution where justified, including where a Councillor:

- is the Mayor; or
- is elected to the ALGA Board or holds another formal representative role requiring attendance.

4.8 Professional memberships and subscriptions

Council is a member of:

- The MAV;
- The VLGA; and
- The ALGWA.

Individual memberships, professional associations or subscriptions which are considered demonstrably beneficial to Council or the performance of the duties of a Councillor may be reimbursed subject to a resolution of Council.

Professional membership will not be paid for the Australian Institute of Company Directors, unless the membership fee is included or otherwise reduces the cost of the Company Directors course. The membership must be deleted from the list of professional memberships for the subsequent years after completing the course.

4.9 Community participation

4.9.1 Event roles

The Mayor is the primary Council representative for events. If the Mayor is unavailable to attend an event, the Deputy Mayor (if appointed) will become the primary representative. If the Deputy Mayor is not available, the Mayor may delegate the role to a Councillor.

Where there is a significant event link to a Councillor as a committee representative or area of responsibility (i.e. Councillor Responsible For), the Mayor may choose to delegate their role to the appropriate Councillor, ahead of the Deputy Mayor.

Speech support is only provided for Councillors who wish to speak at functions in an official role as Merri-bek representative (i.e. Mayor's delegate).

The Mayor, or delegated Councillor representing Council at an event is entitled to be paid by Council, or reimbursed, reasonable bona fide costs associated with representing Council at the event. Should any other Councillor wish to attend the event then the costs associated with attending the event will be borne by the Councillor.

The Mayor will undertake any official role at Council events or may delegate the role to the Deputy Mayor or other Councillor with related responsibilities. The Chief Executive Officer or (Chief Executive Officer 's delegate) will usually act as master of ceremonies (MC) if required.

Invitations for Council events will be issued from the Mayor. All Councillors will receive an invitation to Council organised or sponsored events.

4.9.2 Local community events

Attendance at local events and functions is a key part of a Councillor's representative role.

Councillors will carefully consider if their attendance at an event or function truly relates to the duties of office, and whether community resources should be used to pay for their attendance.

Councillors will avoid conflicts of interest (or perceptions of) that may arise as a result of their attendance at events and functions, including the applicable gifts threshold.

Under Section 128 of the Act, a material conflict of interest because of receipt of an applicable gift does not include reasonable hospitality received by the person at an event or function the person attended in an official capacity as a Councillor.

Hospitality is a gift where a Councillor attends an event or function:

- From free tickets the Councillor received and there are NO official duties to perform, or
- With free membership; or
- Where the hospitality is generous e.g. a two or three course meal with alcohol at an event or function.

4.9.3 Councillors will act in accordance with the Gift, Benefits and Hospitality Policy for Councillors in disclosing offers. Paid community events

Councillors will be supported to attend paid events that:

- Are Council-organised or Council-sponsored; or
- Are held by groups or organisations based in the City of Merri-bek, have a 'demonstrable benefit' to the local community and are directly related to a Councillor's area of responsibility or committee membership as appointed by Council; or
- Melbourne-based events hosted by key community partners/stakeholder organisations, where an official invitation is received, the Councillor has been invited in an official capacity and attendance has been approved by resolution of Council; and
- Do not conflict with any Council policies or resolutions, such as those related to gambling, and attendance can be viewed as contributing to the fulfillment of the Council's goals. The cost of a Councillor's partner or guest will not be covered by Council and may constitute an applicable gift (or contribute to an applicable gift) under the Act for the Councillor if accepted free of charge.

Ticketed events with a value of \$300 or more per ticket will only be paid with approval by resolution of Council.

4.10 Attendance by Spouse/Partner at Seminars, Conferences and Civic Functions

Attendance at any seminar, conference or civic function by a Councillor's spouse/partner shall

be at the expense of the Councillor except where:

- Prior approval has been given by Council;
- Attendance by a Councillor's spouse/partner is considered to be necessary or appropriate to support the business or representational needs of Council (for example, for the purpose of childcare or other care needs); and
- Sufficient provision exists in the approved budget for conferences and seminars.

Where Council has approved a Councillor's spouse/partner to attend a seminar, conference or civic function, Councillors are entitled to have paid by Council, or reimbursed, their spouse or partner's:

- Registration fees (for a Civic Function, but not a seminar or conference);
- Reasonable costs for meals and refreshments;
- Attendance at one primary conference dinner, when held, for each interstate conference attended.

Other than this, all additional costs incurred for the attendance of a spouse/partner will be at the expense of the Councillor. Councillors are entitled to have paid by Council, or reimbursed, the reasonable costs and expenses of their spouse or partner attending:

- Functions held by Council;
- Functions held by other Victorian municipalities or local government peak bodies; and
- Where there is an agreed expectation of partners attending, i.e. spouse/partner of the Councillor is specified on the invitation.

The above is subject to funds being available within the budget and based on equity amongst all Councillors. Costs will be met from the Mayor and Councillors conferences and seminars budget.

4.11 Insurance and indemnity (combined sections)

Section 43 of the Act provides:

A Council must indemnify and keep indemnified each Councillor, member of a delegated committee ... against all actions or claims whether arising during or after their term of office in respect of anything necessarily done or reasonably done or omitted to be done in good faith:

- a) in the performance of a duty or a function or the exercise of a power under this Act, the regulations or a local law or any other Act; or
- b) in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the performance of a duty or a function or the exercise of a power under this Act, the regulations or a local law or any other Act.

Councillors are covered under the following Council insurance policies while discharging, in good faith, the duties of civic office including attendance at meetings of external bodies as Council representatives:

- Public liability;

- Professional indemnity;
- Councillors' and officers' liability; and
- Business Travel Insurance policy (approved accompanying partners are also covered).

The Council will pay the insurance policy excess in respect of any claim made against a Councillor arising from Council business where any claim is accepted by Council's insurers, whether defended or not.

4.12 Health and Wellbeing

In line with Merri-bek's commitment to promoting a healthy working environment, Councillors and immediate family can access Council's appointed confidential professional counselling service (EAP) to help resolve personal and Council related problems or concerns that may impact on their capacity to effectively undertake their role as a Councillor.

4.13 Apparel

The Council shall, upon request, lend Councillors protective clothing. This clothing shall be limited to wet weather pants and pullover, gumboots, steel capped boots, winter jacket and/or hat, or other such clothing to meet the organisation's requirements, unless otherwise resolved by Council for a specific item(s).

This clothing is to be returned promptly upon the completion of the activity/duty for which the articles were required. An exception applies to steel capped boots which for Occupational Health and Safety reasons are purchased for Councillors and can be retained.

4.14 Childcare/family care

Councillors are entitled to have paid by Council, or reimbursed, the cost of childcare/family care expenses for immediate family members, necessarily incurred by Councillors whilst discharging their duties as a Councillor within the scope of this Policy, subject to the following conditions:

- The maximum hourly rate a Councillor will be reimbursed for childcare/family care expenses is twenty-eight dollars and thirty-one cents (\$28.31) per hour indexed annually to CPI at the commencement of each Mayoral term;
- Childcare/family care costs must be substantiated by a receipt from the caregiver showing the dates and times care was provided, and the Councillor shall show why the care was needed on each occasion; and
- A person who provides child/family care does not need to be a licensed or registered provider, however, must not be an immediate family member (partner, mother/father, sister/brother, grandmother/grandfather or sister-in-law/brother-in-law) or person who normally lives with the Councillor or child/family member.

For the purposes of this Policy, a child shall be defined as up to but not including 16 years of age.

4.15 Support for a Councillor with a Disability

The Chief Executive Officer or delegate will assess and approve reasonable support - through additional facilities and expenses - to allow a Councillor with a disability to perform their duties

of office

4.16 Sponsorship and Donations

Any sponsorship or donations made by a Councillor will be made on their own behalf and not on behalf of Council, except in accordance with a prior resolution of Council.

Councillor sponsorship and donations not in accordance with a prior resolution of Council (in accordance with the Sponsorship and Donations Guidelines) will not be reimbursed by Council.

4.17 Available Budget & Approval

An annual budget is provided in the Mayor and Councillor budget for attendance at seminars, conferences and training and community events. This budget will allow Councillors to access up to a maximum \$10,000 (plus GST) for relevant professional development and initiatives (as listed above) over the course of a Councillor's elected period (4 years). Any further expenditure requested will be presented to Council for approval. A resolution of Council will be required to exceed this cap.

4.17.1 Where Council Resolution is required

Where any professional development activity, seminar or conference attendance activity exceeds \$1,500 (excluding GST).

- a) AICD Company Directors course
- b) Where interstate or overseas travel is requested (refer section 4.4)
- c) Where any further expenditure exceeding an individual Councillors, annual budget is requested.
- d) Individual memberships, professional associations or subscriptions which are considered demonstrably beneficial to Council or the performance of the duties of a Councillor may be reimbursed.
- e) Melbourne-based events hosted by key community partners/stakeholder organisations, where an official invitation is received, and a Councillor has been invited in an official capacity;
- f) Ticketed events with a value of \$300 or more per ticket.
- g) Attendance by spouse/partner at Seminars, Conferences and Civic Functions
- h) Any requests for bulk copying or printing (more than 10 copies of a document that is more than 20 pages in length)

4.18 Arrangements and Reimbursement

4.18.1 Processing Arrangements

Prior to approving any registration, Councillors will submit relevant details for approval, and consider the following factors:

- the alignment of the request with this Policy; and
- the available budget for that Councillor.

If attendance is approved as aligned with the Policy and within the available budget, the Mayor and Councillor Support team will make arrangements for payment and registration.

If attendance is not aligned with the Policy or the available budget has been exceeded, the Councillor will be advised of the options to either seek a Council resolution to approve attendance or pay for attendance themselves.

4.18.2 Council paid items (in advance/directly invoiced)

For equipment that meets Council's IT standards (and hence is supported by Council), Council will meet the purchase, initial installation, maintenance costs, connection fees, rental charges and the operating costs of that equipment incurred by Councillors in the undertaking of their Councillor duties including all Council business call charges.

4.18.3 Claims for Reimbursements

Where a request is made for reimbursement of expenses incurred under this policy, Council may reimburse an amount less than the amount claimed where the actual expense incurred is considered unreasonable, taking into account the estimated costs to Council to purchase similar goods.

Claims are to be submitted by a Councillor via the online form on the Councillor Portal. If the online form cannot be accessed, the Mayor and Councillor Support team may provide a hardcopy form which must be completed and signed by the Councillor.

Claims should be accompanied by original receipts/tax invoices for any expenses claimed which clearly identify the name of the payee and ABN where applicable.

If receipts cannot be produced, Councillors may be required to provide a statutory declaration.

Claims must include sufficient detail to demonstrate, in accordance with the Act that the expense for which reimbursement is claimed is a reasonable out-of-pocket expense incurred while performing the duties of a Councillor.

4.18.4 Timeframe for submission of claims

Councillors are required to submit claims in a timely manner to ensure transparency and timely accountability.

Claims for reimbursement of expenses in the September, December and March quarters must be submitted by the close of business of the following month to allow for accurate and timely recording of Councillor expenses on Council's website.

Claims for reimbursement of expenses in the June quarter must be submitted within 14 working days of the end of financial year.

Claims for reimbursement of expenses incurred in a particular financial year cannot be accepted once the accounts for that year have been closed.

Reimbursements will be paid by electronic funds transfer within 21 days of a compliant claim form being submitted.

4.18.5 Assessment of claims Approvals

Approval for payment of costs and reimbursement of expenses in accordance with this policy will be made by the Manager Governance and Strategy or Unit Manager Governance & Risk in accordance with delegations by the Chief Executive Officer. The Executive Officer Civic and CEO Officer will assist in administering the approval process.

If there is a question about a claim, in the first instance, this will be discussed with the relevant Councillor.

If required, guidance/intervention will be sought from the Chief Executive Officer.

If required, the Chief Executive Officer will refer claims to a Council meeting for determination.

4.18.6 Injury or Illness preventing attendance at a paid event or conference

Councillors who suffer from an injury or illness preventing them from attending a course, conference or workshop, particularly where travel is involved, should notify the Manager Governance and Strategy preferably with enough notice for Council to either substitute an alternative Councillor or to cancel the intended travel and accommodation arrangements and any associated costs.

Failure to inform Council of non-attendance may result in Council seeking reimbursement from the Councillor.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities	Timelines
Chief Executive Officer	Determines exceptions to this policy where there is not enough time available to seek a resolution of Council (if required).	As required
Director Business Transformation	Is consulted by the Manager Governance and Strategy or Unit Manager Governance and Risk and administers this Policy in their absence.	As required
Manager Governance and Strategy	Administers this Policy.	Ongoing
Unit Manager Governance and Risk	Administers this Policy, maintains the Interstate and Overseas Travel Register, arranges for Council reporting when required, ensures legislative requirements are met, and researches, coordinates consultation, reviews and updates the Policy.	Ongoing

6. Monitoring, Evaluating and review

The cost of Councillor support and resources will be monitored and reviewed by the Manager Governance and Strategy to ensure that ongoing expenses can be accommodated within the Mayor and Councillors budget.

The Policy will be reviewed at least once each Council term to ensure the required support and resources are being provided to enable Councillors to fulfil their duties as elected representatives.

7. Reporting

As soon as practicable after attending an activity approved via Council resolution, Councillors must provide a verbal or written report to all Councillors on their attendance. Verbal reports can be presented at a Council meeting under the Acknowledgements and Other Matters section of the agenda. Written reports can be submitted by completing the Attendance at an

Approved Activity form in Councillor Connect or by emailing the Unit Manager Governance and Risk. The information provided will be included in the Governance report at the next scheduled Council meeting.

The cost of Councillor support and resource expenses is to be reported to the community by inclusion of the details on the Council website. This will be reported quarterly.

In addition, Council will maintain and have available for public inspection, a register of overseas and interstate travel (other than interstate travel by land for less than three days) by Council staff and Councillors.

8. Definitions

Term	Definition
Bona fide costs/expenses	Costs or expenses incurred by a Councillor where it can be demonstrated with supporting documentation that the expenses were incurred during the course of Council business.
Carer	Carer is defined under section 4 of the Carers Recognition Act 2012.
Delegated Committee	A committee with delegated power established under section 63 of the Local Government Act 2020.

9. Associated Documents

- Model Councillor Code of Conduct
- Fleet Selection Policy
- Public Transparency Policy
- Carers Recognition Act 2012
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Local Government Act 2020

10. References

[The average babysitting cost in Australia](#)

8. NOTICES OF MOTION

8.1 GLENROY PASCOE VALE ROAD ACTIVITY CENTRE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND REVITALISATION

Cr Helen Davidson

Motion

That Council:

1. Recognises the importance of revitalising and beautifying Pascoe Vale Road (a State Road) within the Glenroy Activity Centre to improve visual appeal, public amenity, strengthen community pride, increase perceptions of safety and support local economic growth.
2. Recognises ongoing community and trader concerns regarding safety, amenity, and cleanliness throughout the precinct, and acknowledges the necessity for collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches to revitalisation between Council, State Government, traders, property owners, and key stakeholders.
3. Requests officers undertake an audit of the Glenroy Pascoe Vale Road Activity Centre to identify priority maintenance, beautification, safety and activation works, including opportunities for Tricky Spot tree plantings, damaged bollards and pedestrian railings, graffiti removal and pressure cleaning requirements, and report back to Council by November 2026 outlining the findings, proposed priority actions and recommendations for further improvements.
4. Requests officers incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in all future design and delivery works within the activity centre, with a view to improving community safety and fostering a welcoming, pedestrian-friendly environment.
5. Continues to engage with traders and landlords and property owners to address concerns related to shopfront cleanliness and presentation, and support activation of shopfronts to create a more vibrant and inviting streetscape.
6. The Mayor writes to Coles (and the relevant state MP), seeking their collaboration in improving the amenity and safety of their carpark, including enhanced landscaping, lighting, maintenance, and a more attractive community environment.
7. The Mayor writes to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the local State Member advocating for streetscape and infrastructure improvements along Pascoe Vale Road as a key activity centre.

1. Background

Cr Davidson's background:

The Glenroy Activity Centre is one of Merri-bek's three Major Activity Centres. It is in need of significant renewal in the short, medium and long term.

Local Glenroy traders and community members regularly express concern at the state of Glenroy's central business precinct. It is tired and in need of renewal, and there are increasing safety concerns linked to antisocial behaviour and the current wave of crime that is impacting many Melbourne activity centres. While many of these issues are led by State government (state roads, crime) and private entities (eg Coles is responsible for significant public realm), Council has a role to play in its own services, and in advocating to other agencies to play their part in making Glenroy safe and beautiful.

Existing and long term programs

Council has a suite of actions in train to support the transformation of the Glenroy Activity Centre to improve safety, amenity, and cleanliness throughout the precinct. However many of these are medium and longer term initiatives that will take many years to develop and implement. They include:

- The Wheatsheaf Road Streetscape Improvement project is delivering safer crossings, new street trees, drainage and footpath upgrades, traffic calming and opportunities for outdoor dining; stage 1 drainage works are complete and, once approvals are in place for the next stages, the remaining construction is expected to take about 10 months.
- Post Office Place will have a complete overhaul to make the street safer, greener and more welcoming for shopping, walking and spending time. Community engagement was undertaken in March 2026 with feedback being analysed to prepare engagement findings and being incorporated into the preparation of a draft concept design. The delivery timeframe will be confirmed after consultation on the draft concept design, detailed design and future budget decisions.

Council has some broad programs that direct Council's short and long term investment including in Glenroy. These include:

- Places for People is a municipality-wide framework to guide new and upgraded public spaces in activity centres and to help prioritise projects through Council's capital works program over coming years. Places for People projects deliver greener, safer and more inviting public spaces, while also helping Council target improvements that strengthen local identity, accessibility and economic activity.
- Council's Urban Forest Strategy expands canopy cover across Merri-bek to improve shade, cooling, biodiversity and neighbourhood amenity, including through more tree planting in streets, parks and other public spaces. Within activity centres, a "Tricky Places" approach helps identify opportunities to introduce trees and greening in sites that are more difficult to plant, such as narrow streets, paved areas and spaces with competing infrastructure demands. These approaches support practical greening outcomes in Glenroy, where additional canopy, landscaping and integrated water-sensitive design can contribute to a cooler, more attractive and more resilient public realm.
- Council also delivers ongoing operational improvements in cleansing, graffiti management, and waste infrastructure. Regular advice and targeted interventions are provided to address graffiti, litter, and amenity issues, ensuring public spaces are well-maintained. These actions complement broader revitalisation strategies and contribute to a cleaner, safer, and more attractive activity centre environment.

This motion is focused on actions that Council can take in the short- term to directly address, or advocate to others to address, safety, amenity and beautification of the public realm in the Glenroy Activity Centre.

2. Policy Context

Officer's comments:

There are a range of opportunities for streetscape and public space improvements in the Glenroy Activity Centre which align with the draft Places for People Plan.

3. Financial Implications

Officer's comments:

The motion can be actioned within existing council budgets and outcomes of an audit can be actioned as part of Council's standard maintenance program.

4. Resources Implications

Officer's comments:

The motion can be delivered using existing council resources.