

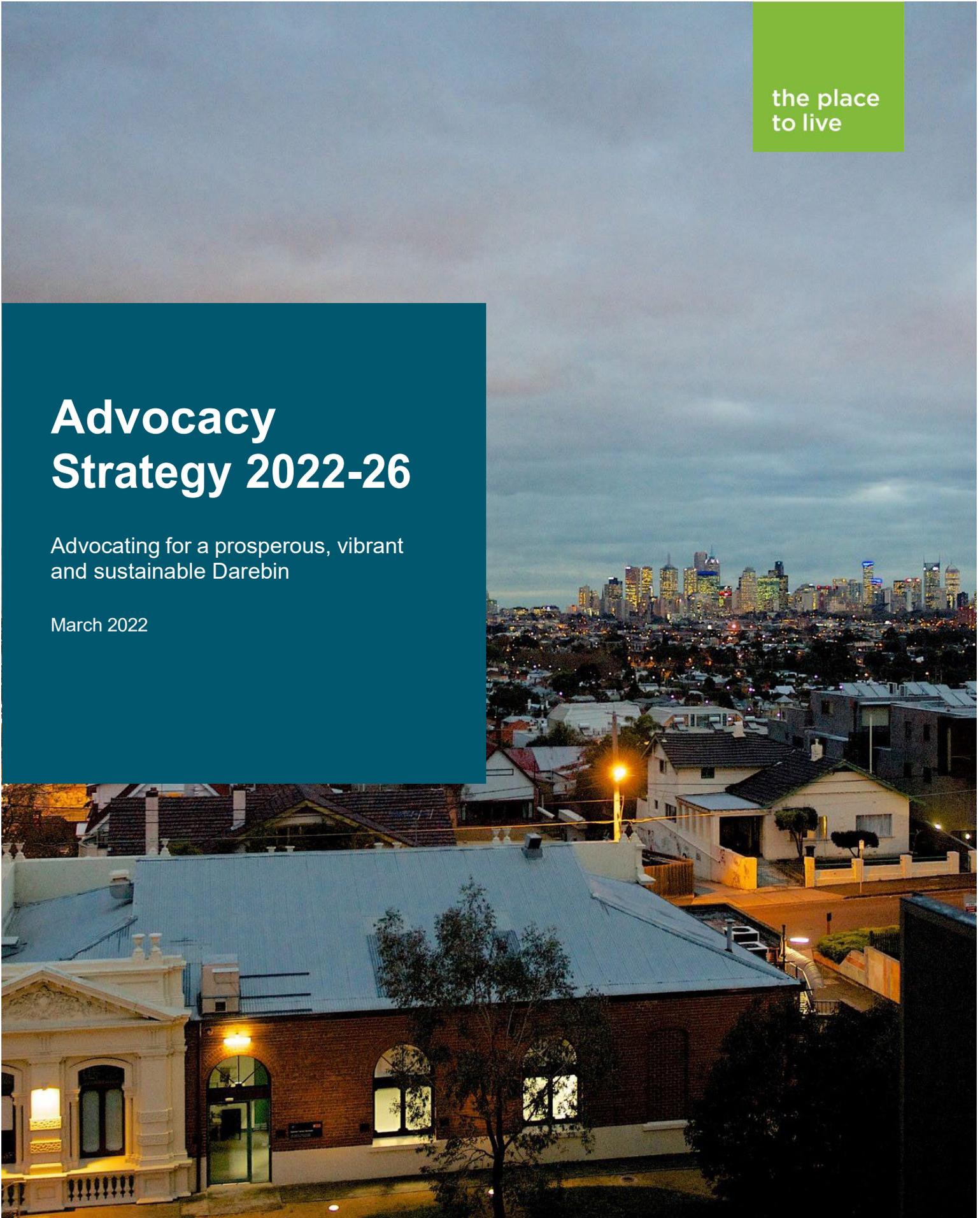


the place
to live

Advocacy Strategy 2022-26

Advocating for a prosperous, vibrant
and sustainable Darebin

March 2022



Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Darebin City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters we now call Darebin and affirms that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have lived on this land for millennia, practising their customs and ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. Council acknowledges that Elders past, present and emerging are central to the cohesion, intergenerational wellbeing and ongoing self-determination of Aboriginal communities. They have played and continue to play a pivotal role in maintaining and transmitting culture, history and language.

Council respects and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' values, living culture and practices, including their continuing spiritual connection to the land and waters and their right to self-determination. Council also recognises the diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities have had and continue to play a unique role in the life of the Darebin municipality. Council recognises and values this ongoing contribution and its significant value for our city and Australian society more broadly. Extract from Darebin City Council's Statement of commitment to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2019.

Darebin's Diversity Statement

Situated on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the City of Darebin is now home to a diverse community of people with different socioeconomic status, gender, age, ability, race, culture, ethnicity, language, sexuality, sex characteristics, gender identity, beliefs, occupations, income, education, carer status and household type.

The Darebin community cherishes this diversity and values it as an important civic asset. Darebin City Council acknowledges the history and contributions of the various communities, migrants and refugees who have made the municipality their home. Their endeavours have enriched the economic, social, cultural, artistic, community and civic character of the city, and created a cosmopolitan locality where variety and difference are welcomed and encouraged. Council also acknowledges that who we are today as a municipality rests on the history of loss and dispossession inflicted upon Aboriginal people, past and present, despite their strengths, resilience and continued contributions to our city.

Climate Emergency and Climate Risk

Addressing climate change is a key responsibility of Local Government under Victorian legislation. The Climate Change Act 2017 sets a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 for Victoria and requires five-yearly interim targets to be set by the State Government. It also provides guidance for state and local government decision-making across a suite of legislation – including the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Local Government Act 2020. The Local Government Act 2020 now requires Local Government to address climate change and consider climate change risks, as one of the key overarching governance principles.

Darebin City Council has a proud history of leadership in relation to tackling climate change. In 2016, our Council was the first government of any kind to declare a climate emergency - requiring urgent action by all levels of government, including Local Government. Since then, more than 1,900 governments around the world have made similar declarations and committed to urgent action to address climate change. In 2017, Darebin City Council adopted its Climate Emergency Plan 2017-2022, that outlined Council's commitment to aim for zero greenhouse gas emissions for our Council and community. We called on the State Government and Federal Government to declare a climate emergency and legislate programs to drive an emergency response. On 2 December 2019, our Council further resolved to call on the State Government and Federal Government to achieve zero emissions by 2030. Council's commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency continues through this 2021-2025 Council Plan (incorporating Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan).

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A message from our Mayor

As a proudly socio-economic and culturally diverse community, Darebin has a longstanding history of leading advocacy efforts to influence outcomes for our residents.

We have always been proud to stand up, lead and advocate for social justice and issues at the heart of our community's needs and wellbeing.

In 2017, we were one of the first in Australia to move our citizenship ceremonies and community awards away from 26 January in recognition of the ongoing disadvantage Aboriginal people continue to experience, and to foster the conversation about how we should really mark 26 January.

We were the first government of any kind to declare a climate emergency in 2016, calling for urgent action by all levels of government. Since then, almost 2,000 other governments around the world have made similar declarations and committed to urgent action to address climate change.

As a leading member of the Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum, we have campaigned for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers including opposing mandatory detention.

Our advocacy to Federal and State governments has proudly influenced and raised awareness of the need for investment and policy priorities for local infrastructure, programs and initiatives.

We proudly continue to advocate with our community to protect the Preston Market. With our petition receiving over 11,000 signatures, we will continue to call on the State Government, Victorian Planning Authority and developer of the site to retain the market in its current form.

Our efforts were successful in getting a commitment from the State Government to remove more level crossings, including four in Preston and the removal of the Keon Park level crossing.

We have also influenced other outcomes including the establishment of the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, a new home for the Matildas at La Trobe University and over \$10 million in funding for local initiatives. This includes \$3 million of State funding for Narrandjeri Stadium and an additional \$10 million State Sport Infrastructure Loan to redevelop the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre.

While government support for COVID-19 is greatly welcomed, the reality is we need far more. The pandemic has compounded existing socio-economic, health and wellbeing issues in our city, and we need help to fix them.

Over the last two years, our community has come together to support one another. We are a strong, resilient, proud, hardworking and diverse community with a long history and sense for social justice.

That is why, along with the implementation of our Council Plan (2021-25)¹, we are refocussing our advocacy efforts through this Advocacy Strategy. This will enable us to influence much-needed new Federal and State commitments in response to local challenges and opportunities.

By partnering with Government and community sectors through our advocacy strategy, we can collaborate to build a more prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin – now and into the future.

We are the beating heart of Melbourne's north. Our geographic location primes us to partner with other governments to facilitate investment and support for outcomes that foster community, local and regional economic, employment, health and wellbeing outcomes.

I am looking forward to advocating, engaging and partnering in good faith to build awareness and support for the priorities in this strategy, and hope that it will leave a legacy for generations to come.

Cr Lina Messina
Mayor, Darebin City Council

About Darebin

The City of Darebin is located between five and 15 kilometres north of Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD). It has been home to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation for many thousands of years.

Our city covers an area of 53 square kilometres, stretching from the inner northern suburbs of Northcote and Fairfield to Reservoir and Bundoora.

We are growing. In 2019, our city's population was 164,184 people, and this is expected to increase by 65,934 people to a total of 230,118 by 2041.

We are home to one of Victoria's largest and most diverse communities, with a range of cultures, languages, religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, employment status, occupations and housing needs.

In 2016, 48,842 Darebin residents were born overseas and 25% had arrived in Australia in the previous five years.

We have a diverse mix of properties, with 67,051 residential properties, 4,637 business properties and 530 mixed-use properties.

Our largest industries are education and training, retail, manufacturing, health care and social assistance.

As a council, we are responsible for a large part of Darebin's infrastructure and natural habitat. We own, manage or maintain:

- 333 buildings
- 930 hectares of open space (including parks and gardens)
- 509 km of roads
- 30 km of shared paths
- 1,035 km of footpaths
- 13 road bridges
- 52 foot bridges
- 614 km of stormwater drains
- 23,370 stormwater pits
- 30 gross pollutant traps (structures that trap solid waste such as litter).

While Darebin's social and economic prosperity is changing with more residents earning higher incomes, there are still many people and parts of our city experiencing significant disadvantage and hardship – particularly in Darebin's northern suburbs.

Darebin's Advocacy Strategy seeks to influence new outcomes around building a more prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin – one community with no suburb left behind.

Advocacy at Darebin

Darebin Council advocates to raise awareness about local issues and influence new outcomes and support for our community. We aim for outcomes that respond to Darebin's priorities, needs, challenges and opportunities.

Why we advocate

While Council provides and delivers a vast range of services, resources and facilities for our community, we alone cannot do everything.

In a highly challenging financial environment for local government that includes ongoing rate capping, the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, and growing expectations for councils to provide more services for a growing community, advocacy provides a pathway to attract new investment for local initiatives that respond to community needs.

As set out in the Local Government Act 2020, Section 9(2)(f), one of the overarching principles of local government is that "collaboration with other councils, governments and statutory bodies is sought"³.

By leveraging Council's own work and services across the city to build broader awareness around local priorities, we can advocate to attract new funding and support from the Federal Government, State Government, statutory bodies and non-government organisations.

There are numerous projects, initiatives and policy areas that are outside of our direct control and capacity. These include major transport infrastructure, climate change, employment, health and socio-economic outcomes. These require collaboration and engagement across all tiers of government to succeed.

By taking a proactive approach to advocacy (informed by a whole-of-council Advocacy Strategy), we ensure our advocacy priorities are regularly socialised with and asserted to decision makers at all levels, including parliamentarians, government departments, statutory bodies, strategic stakeholders and community organisations.

This approach will position Darebin to continue its leading role in influencing Federal, State and non-government decision makers and partners to achieve great outcomes for our community.

How we advocate

There are a range of tools that we use to advocate effectively:

- Regular liaison and engagement with all local Federal and State parliamentarians.
- Strategic engagement with Federal and State ministers, shadow ministers and other parliamentarians, including crossbenchers and parliamentary committee members.
- Engagement with local State and Federal election candidates.
- Proactive participation in the work of peak bodies and regional organisations, including M9, Northern Council's Alliance (NCA), Northern Metropolitan Partnerships, Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA), the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and many others.
- Identifying, developing, strengthening and leveraging partnerships with key stakeholders, peak bodies, local and regional organisations, community groups and residents.

- Recruiting and engagement with stakeholders and ambassadors to coordinate and support mutually aligned advocacy priorities.
- Development of an annual 12-month Advocacy Platform to guide and lead Council's annual advocacy efforts, accompanied by relevant advocacy materials.
- Running advocacy activities, events and campaigns to raise awareness of issues in the community to influence decision making and encourage community involvement.
- Activating and encouraging the community to support our advocacy efforts in effective ways.
- Making and leveraging policy submissions to government, parliamentary and policy enquiries.
- Strategically identifying and applying for grants to secure funding to deliver the Council Plan, Advocacy Strategy and Advocacy Platform, and broader advocacy opportunities.
- Acknowledging and thanking the Federal or State Governments for funding and policy investments or commitments that align with Council's Advocacy priorities, as they arise.
- Delivering media, print and digital communications to promote our broad advocacy agenda.
- Identifying and responding to strategic media and communication opportunities to assert Darebin's relevant advocacy themes and priorities.
- Building capacity to embed a whole-of-council approach to advocacy and engagement at Darebin.

It is also important to highlight and recognise the importance of ensuring all of Council's advocacy efforts seek to complement, engage with, and encourage participation from our community.

At every possible and appropriate opportunity, we will seek to encourage and integrate community involvement in any Council advocacy activity or initiative during the implementation phase of the Strategy and Platform.

Another part of our advocacy approach includes identifying and strengthening key strategic partnerships with peak bodies, stakeholders and regional and community organisations. We aim to engage in a manner that aligns with and complements our advocacy priorities, so we can build momentum around Darebin's needs and opportunities.

We will leverage strategic partnerships through memorandums of understanding, joint advocacy initiatives, events and letters of support to build awareness of Darebin's advocacy priorities.

Our whole-of-council approach to advocacy

This Advocacy Strategy will seek to embed a new whole-of-council approach to advocacy across Darebin. This includes:

- Continually working to lead the discussion locally and broadly around advocacy priorities to influence decision makers and build community awareness and support.
- Fostering a culture where the Mayor, Councillors and whole organisation shares in the responsibility and opportunities to influence advocacy outcomes.
- As the lead spokesperson, the Mayor will formally lead Council's advocacy efforts, however opportunities for Councillors to support and champion specific priorities will be developed.
- Working to develop a unified voice – both externally and internally – around whole-of-council advocacy messaging and engagement on priorities.
- Engagement between the political, executive, and officer level of Council with government, departments, stakeholders and community organisations.
- Aligning and coordinating our advocacy efforts, including via notices of motion for Council meetings, relating to all advocacy matters and requests of government.

- Establishing an Advocacy and Engagement Ordinary Council Meeting Report (quarterly), including:
 - an overview report
 - status updates on advocacy themes and priorities
 - status updates on advocacy activities, meetings, events, communications and engagement
 - a strategic update on other activities – for example, grants applied for
- Councillor briefings, workshops and support to build advocacy capacity (including through the alignment and coordination of notices of motion at Council meetings).
- Coordinated internal Council advocacy group or committee for council officers.
- Regular external and internal information sharing and promotion of issues and opportunities.
- Regular strategic media and communications, including distribution of relevant advocacy materials and content to build awareness, momentum and support for advocacy themes and priorities.

Our initiatives, achievements and outcomes

We have a proud history of leading advocacy efforts to influence outcomes for our residents.

Some key advocacy initiative highlights and outcomes over recent years include:

- In 2016, our Council was the first government of any kind to declare a climate emergency, requiring urgent action by all levels of government. Since then, 2,000 other governments around the world have made similar declarations for urgent action to address climate change.
- In 2017, Darebin was one of the first councils to move its citizenship ceremonies and community awards away from 26 January, in recognition of the ongoing disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience after European invasion.
- Darebin led 46 Victorian councils in 2021 to launch the Victorian Energy Collaboration – the largest ever emissions reduction project by local government in Australia. The project aims to power 45% of all Victorian councils' electricity with renewables and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 260,000 tonnes of CO² every year.⁴
- Darebin's advocacy for the rights and treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, including opposition to mandatory detention at the Mantra Hotel in Preston, which highlighted the need to fairly expedite the claims of people seeking asylum.
- Council's 'Protect the Preston Market' campaign has continued to generate significant community awareness and support, including 11,000+ signatures to our petition. We have maintained ongoing pressure on the State Government, Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) and landowners to retain the Preston Market in its current site and form. We also influenced the decision of the Minister for Planning, the Hon. Richard Wynne MP, to direct the VPA to revise plans for the market in consultation with the Office of the Victorian Government Architect.
- Advocacy on current Level Crossing Removal Projects at Murray Road, Cramer Street, Bell Street and Oakover Road in Preston, and Keon Parade in Keon Park. Advocacy on previous level crossing removals in Reservoir and the new Reservoir Station.
- Participation on the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, which has provided \$2.6 million towards local activity centre revitalisation projects and initiatives.
- Support for the \$116 million home of the Matildas and Rugby Union at La Trobe University.
- Around \$5 million received from State Government over recent years for local sporting club facilities, lights, netball courts and women-friendly change rooms.
- Being awarded a \$10 million State Government and Sport and Recreation Victoria Community Sport Infrastructure Loan to construct the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre.
- \$3 million from the State Government and Sport and Recreation Victoria towards the construction of Narrandjeri Stadium and outdoor netball courts at John Cain Memorial Park.
- Over \$1 million of State Government investment for parks including Oakover Road (\$400,000), Ruthven play space (\$200,000), Penders play space (\$300,000) and Edwardes Lake (\$275,000).
- State Government funding through the Building Blocks Program for local early childhood and kinder projects and initiatives, including \$150,000 for planning and design for the Merri Community Childcare Centre and Kindergarten in Thornbury, J.S Grey Kindergarten in West Preston, and Maryborough Avenue Kindergarten in Kingsbury.
- Annual Federal Government funding and grants via the Roads to Recovery and Local Roads and Community Infrastructure grants programs.

While these are all welcome initiatives that have been provided for Darebin, far more is required to so we can achieve a more prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin.

Darebin's advocacy context

Darebin is strategically positioned to facilitate local, municipal and regional socio-economic and sustainability outcomes.

Our strategic position in Melbourne's north

Situated at the heart of Melbourne's northern region, Darebin is strategically placed between 5km and 15km to the Melbourne CBD. We are rapidly growing in the outer north region – one the fastest in Australia.

Melbourne's north is expected to grow from over 1 million residents today, to just under 1.5 million residents by 2036 – an increase of 500,000 people, or 50%. With Melbourne's northern region alone being forecast to reach a population size similar to that of Adelaide, supporting investments and commitments that can solidify region wide economic, job, transport and environmental outcomes will be critical to respond to immediate and future needs⁵.

Darebin is strategically placed to facilitate positive socio-economic and sustainability outcomes in Melbourne's outer and inner northern suburbs. We are also positioned to become a regional hub for employment, skills, health and wellbeing opportunities.

With Melbourne's north producing around \$40 billion in goods and services per year⁵, Darebin strongly contributes to regional economic and environmental outcomes. We are a member of the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA), which aims to reduce carbon emissions in the region⁴. We also contribute \$7.58 billion in Gross Regional Product, and are home to 57,700 local jobs, over 85,000 employed residents and 13,300 local businesses⁶.

Darebin's population is expected to increase by around 40% (or 65,934 people) from 164,184 people to 230,118 by 2041¹. An opportunity exists for the Federal and State Government to partner with Council and our community to solidify Darebin as the environmental and economic heart of the north.

While we were delighted the Darebin suburb of Northcote was identified as Melbourne's most liveable and vibrant place to live, work and play in 2021, according to global consultancy firm PwC⁷, Council is committed to ensuring the same socio-economic opportunities for all residents, with no suburb left behind. This includes the northern reaches of the city in Preston and Reservoir.

By leveraging the State Government's recent major infrastructure investments in Darebin, including its level crossing removal projects and new stations at Preston and Reservoir (also a future Suburban Rail Loop precinct), Darebin is well positioned to become a jobs hub for the northern region.

Building on Darebin's traditional blue collar, manufacturing and industrial strengths and ongoing environmental leadership, we are an ideal candidate for a new sustainable employment hub for Melbourne's north – one that can provide residents with equal opportunities for jobs and education. This can build on our current assets, including La Trobe University in Bundoora, the Melbourne Polytechnic Campus in Preston and a growing base of innovative, skilled, creative and diverse businesses.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to solidify Darebin as the socio-economic hub of Melbourne's north. This can be achieved through support of Council's advocacy priorities, which will also play an important role in alleviating regional transport and congestion challenges. Generational opportunities also exist to significantly enhance investment and outcomes across local health and wellbeing services and respond to ongoing socio-economic disadvantage and needs in Darebin.

Our socio-economic, health, wellbeing and environmental challenges

While we welcome recent Federal and State Government support responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including measures like JobKeeper, JobSeeker and the Business Support Fund, the reality is Darebin requires more ongoing support than ever to address the prolonged and evolving impacts of COVID-19 on our community. The pandemic has also compounded many pre-existing socio-economic, health and wellbeing issues in Darebin.

As highlighted in Darebin's 2021 Community Health and Wellbeing Profile² and ABS statistics⁶, some key challenges requiring targeted responses and support via advocacy include:

- Darebin's population is expected to increase by around 40%, or 65,934 people, from 164,184 people to 230,118 by 2041.¹
- Some of Melbourne's most socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs include Darebin's northern suburbs including Reservoir (Oakhill, Merrilands, Cheddar, Edwardes Lake), Kingsbury and Preston (East) (according to the SEIFA Index).²
- Darebin's unemployment rate remains high at 7.2% (compared to 6.5% across Victoria).²
- 56% of Darebin's population is employed in full time work (compared to 58% across Greater Melbourne).⁶
- 35% of Darebin's workforce is employed part-time (compared to 33.5 across Greater Melbourne).⁶
- While over 85,000 Darebin residents are employed, there are 57,700 local jobs available.⁶
- Between 2020 and 2021, there was a -2.62% (or -2,309 persons) decline in locally employed residents, from 88,236 to 85,927.⁶
- Between 2020 to 2021, over 1,040 local jobs were lost (or -1.77%), from 58,616 to 57,773.⁶
- 37.1% of Darebin residents have no educational qualification (compared to 38.6% across Greater Melbourne).²
- Darebin has higher rates of residents who use public and active transport to get to and from work (over 25% compared to an average of 12.6% across Victoria).
- Before COVID-19, over 49% of Darebin residents used their car as the primary mode of transport to work.⁶
- To combat the urban island heat effect, we continue to work to lift Darebin's tree canopy cover from 9.8% through our Urban Forest Strategy and RAPID Canopy and Rewilding Programs.^{1 & 8}
- The number of children (aged 0 to 6 years) living in Darebin is forecast to grow from 14,813 in 2020 to 19,388 by 2041 (an increase of 4,575 children), increasing demand for services for families.⁹
- Darebin is missing a major health and wellbeing precinct, since the closure of the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital in the late 1990s.
- Darebin continues to have no dedicated Headspace youth mental health service and has not been identified as a priority rollout site for a State Government adult mental health or Orange Door family violence service.
- 29.5% of people living in Darebin have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression (compared to 27.4% across Victoria).
- 19.8% of people living in Darebin report high to very high levels of psychological distress (compared to 15.4% across Victoria).
- Over 8,774 (or 6%) of Darebin residents have a disability and need help with their daily lives (compared to 4.9% across Melbourne).
- 52.9% of people living in Darebin do not eat the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables per day (compared to 51.6% across Victoria).²
- Darebin has one of the highest proportions of social housing in Victoria, with 4.3% of local housing stock identified as social housing.²

- Darebin has high levels of residents who experience housing stress – 11.9%, compared to 11.7% across Greater Melbourne.²
- 36.3% of people living in Darebin are renters (compared to 27.5% across Victoria).²
- 33.2% of Darebin residents were born overseas (compared with 33.8% in Greater Melbourne).^{1 & 2}
- 7.3% of people living in Darebin speak a language other than English, or cannot speak English very well or at all (compared to 5.6% across Greater Melbourne).^{1, 2 & 6}
- Pockets of Darebin, particularly in the north, experience greater socio-economic challenges than other parts – particularly relating to electronic gambling machines, alcohol and tobacco.²

This Advocacy Strategy acknowledges and aims to respond to these and other community challenges. We will seek Federal and State government support for projects and initiatives that directly assist and support our community to respond to its immediate needs. We will also leverage existing commitments and opportunities and provide a pathway for a more prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin.

How we're supporting a prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin

Along with ongoing advocacy to Federal and State governments, we continue to invest in a range of projects and initiatives that support a prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin.

- Facilitating local COVID-19 recovery efforts to reduce the pandemic's impacts on the Darebin community. This included the facilitation of testing and vaccination facilities, a \$3.2 million local financial assistance package, local shopping voucher program, Love Local campaign, Working for Victoria, Local Job Advocates Program and more.
- Investing more than \$50 million on capital works projects to stimulate local economic activity, jobs and socio-economic outcomes, including:
 - \$34 million for the new Narrandjeri Stadium and outdoor netball courts, a catalyst project for rejuvenating and increasing community access to John Cain Memorial Park
 - Major redevelopment of the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre
 - \$7.9 million for new playgrounds, sporting ovals, pavilions and lighting upgrades
 - \$5.4 million for renewing footpaths
- Outreach and support for over 700 local businesses to provide recovery information, assistance and support through COVID-19.
- Providing over \$540,000 in assistance grants for 237 local businesses.
- Over 1,300 additional seats were provided to local cafes, restaurants and bars by Council and through the State Government's Outdoor Dining Program.
- Ongoing collaboration through the State Government's Reservoir Revitalisation Board to enhance amenity and liveability outcomes in central Reservoir.
- Leading ongoing advocacy efforts for the State Government and VPA to protect and preserve the Preston Market as the catalyst for broader revitalisation in central Preston.
- Securing new electricity contracts for 46 Victorian councils to switch to 100% renewable energy from 1 July 2021 through the Victorian Energy Collaboration (VECO).
- Meeting our 2016 goal of doubling the amount of solar power in Darebin in late 2019 – one year early – and generating 40,855 kW of solar (exceeding our target of 36,000 kW).
- Achieving carbon neutral certification in 2020/21.
- Our Rewilding Program saw 200,000 indigenous trees, shrubs, grasses and groundcovers planted throughout local parks and open spaces and planting over 3,400 trees to provide canopy and habitats through our Breathing Space Strategy.
- Support for our creative and cultural communities, including through the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre, Northcote Town Hall, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre and FUSE Festival.
- Ongoing outreach, support and initiatives for Darebin's diverse community, including older people, people with disability, multicultural communities, women and children during COVID-19.
- Working with our community – including through Council's 15 advisory committees – to facilitate community input to and participation in policy and service development.
- Working with local stakeholders to facilitate and align efforts to support local socio-economic outcomes including La Trobe University, PRACE Merrilands Community Centre and many others..

While these investments in our community and regular service provision are significant progress towards realising our aspirations for Darebin, it is not enough. It is only through advocacy and engagement that we can truly achieve a prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin.

Advocacy Framework Principles

There is a dedicated action in the Darebin Council Plan (2021-25) to “Develop and implement an Advocacy Framework and four-year Advocacy Plan, informed by our Council Plan priorities, aimed at influencing public policy change and attracting support and funding for our priorities” (Item 4.2).

The purpose and objective of Darebin’s Advocacy Strategy (2022-26) is to directly respond to this Council Plan action item and capture, present and guide all of Council’s advocacy themes, priorities and efforts in a coherent, coordinated and strategic way.

In developing the new Advocacy Strategy, we reviewed and analysed Darebin’s Vision, Council Plan, strategies and formal notices of motion from Council meetings to ensure our vast array of advocacy themes and priorities are captured in the one strategy. Feedback was also obtained from a Council executive and officer workshop in December 2021, and via a Councillor advocacy workshop in February 2022.

While at a high level identifying many of Council’s priorities, the overarching strategy is a framework for informing a new dedicated and targeted Advocacy Platform every 12 months. This will align with the Mayoral cycle and broader Federal and State political, policy and budgetary cycles.

Advocacy must remain highly responsive to decision-making by government and other stakeholders. Our 12-month Advocacy Platform to this Strategy will ensure Council’s advocacy priorities and engagement remain strategic and relevant to decision makers and community.

The development of a 12-month Advocacy Platform will ensure that Council and the community’s highest advocacy priorities – including well prepared and deliverable projects, proposals and initiatives – remain at the forefront of our engagement with all levels of government throughout the year.

Having an overarching and comprehensive Advocacy Strategy with our overarching advocacy themes and priorities also means we are not limited to advocating for the items that appear in the annual Advocacy Platform.

Through this Advocacy Strategy, we will proactively adapt to advocate and respond to matters of importance to the community as they arise, or as government priorities, funding streams, grant opportunities change or become available. We will also take advantage of strategic media and communication opportunities when they arise.

The Advocacy Strategy is designed to be a living document and remain relevant as work on Council’s advocacy priorities develops and evolves over the next four years. We will monitor and report on the progress of the Advocacy Strategy’s priorities through Council reports on a regular and quarterly basis from 2023 onwards.

To develop and assemble the priorities contained in the Advocacy Strategy and inform and guide the final set of priorities in a new 12-month Advocacy Platform, the following Framework Principles can inform consideration of this work:

- Alignment and consistency with Darebin’s Vision, Council Plan, strategies and action plans.
- Feedback through a council officer advocacy workshop in December 2021 (and subsequent internal liaison and consultation).
- Feedback through a Councillor advocacy workshop in February 2022 and planned advocacy workshop in early February 2022.
- Development of a new overarching advocacy narrative.

- Development of advocacy themes to inform and allocate relevant priorities in a way that resonates with Federal and State Government policy and portfolio approaches.
- Capturing Council's overall advocacy themes, priorities and asks through a new four-year Advocacy Strategy to guide and coordinate whole-of-council advocacy efforts.
- Ensure the Strategy can provide the framework to guide all of Council's advocacy efforts in a clear, concise and coordinated manner across all engagement channels and networks.
- Use the Advocacy Strategy to inform the development of an annual 12-month Advocacy Platform that considers and refines priorities as follows:
 - Contains limited and a streamlined number of advocacy priorities and asks (recommended around 10 to 15 only per year maximum)
 - Whether a priority has national, state regional and/or local significance
 - Aligns asks where relevant, to Federal or State priorities, and in a manner that leads to a dedicate Darebin-based community advocacy ask or outcome
 - Whether the priority is contained in Council's forward budget and project pipelines of proposed facilities, programs or initiatives, and could receive investment towards its delivery to alleviate Council's investment and resource commitments
 - Contains well prepared and informed asks
 - Uses data and research to build a strong case based in evidence
 - Opportunities to seek commitments around a pilot, trial, feasibility, masterplan or business case on a project or initiative
 - Considers community expectations for local advocacy priorities
- Accompany the development of a new Strategy and Platform, with the administration of rolling new advocacy engagement and activity plan.
- Embed a whole-of-council advocacy approach across Darebin in implementing a new Advocacy Strategy and Platform.

Following the adoption of this Strategy, Council will develop its first 12-month Advocacy Platform from April 2022. It will be refreshed and reviewed every December and will aim to align with Federal and State Government decision cycles and processes.

Read Section 16 of this strategy for more information about proposed implementation, platform development and advocacy activities.

Advocating for a prosperous, liveable and sustainable Darebin

This advocacy strategy seeks to capture all of Council's priorities, as outlined in the Council Vision and Council Plan, whilst strategically positioning Council's advocacy to align with, and influence Federal and State Government and non-government organisations to support local priorities.

Background

Building off the themes our community told us they value through the community consultation in developing our Council Vision, the Advocacy Strategy makes strategic provision for the following themes accordingly of 'greening the city', 'sustainability', 'inclusive diversity', 'safety' and 'lifestyle'.

The Advocacy Strategy also captures and strategically makes provision for the themes contained in the Council Plan, which include 'vibrant, respectful and connected', 'prosperous, liveable and flourishing', and 'climate, green and sustainable'.

Through the new Advocacy Strategy, Council will be advocating to foster a more prosperous, liveable and sustainable Darebin, guided by the following refined and consolidated advocacy priority pillars (alignment with Council Plan Themes):

- **Environment, Climate Change and Circular Economy**
(Climate, Green and Sustainable Council Plan Theme)
- **Fairness and Equity**
(Vibrant, Respectful and Connected Council Plan Theme)
- **Sustainable Transport and Connectivity**
(Climate, Green and Sustainable Council Plan Theme and Prosperous, Liveable and Flourishing Council Plan Theme)
- **Community Wellbeing and Infrastructure**
(Vibrant Respectful and Connected Council Plan Theme)
- **Prosperous, Creative and Liveable Darebin**
(Prosperous, Liveable and Flourishing Council Plan Theme)

Overarching Advocacy and Campaign Theme

Darebin City Council has developed a new 2022-2026 Advocacy Strategy, to consolidate, coordinate and guide all of Council's advocacy efforts over the next four year, and to seek new partnerships and commitments from the Federal and State Governments to support local priorities ahead of respective policy, budget and election cycles.

Darebin's 2022-2026 Advocacy Strategy seeks to primarily advocate and influence commitments that can help build and foster a more prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin, by providing a pathway for the Federal and State Governments to partner with Council around a range of local projects and initiatives, led via the following overarching themes.

Prosperous

With Federal and State Government support, Council's advocacy priorities will help foster a more prosperous Darebin, by ensuring that as one Darebin, all local people and their needs are valued and supported- with no suburb left behind. Council's advocacy strategy contains a range of priorities, projects and initiatives that can help foster a more prosperous future for all Darebin residents that can proactively support and respond to socio-economic, employment, health and wellbeing challenges and opportunities, particularly as part of our community's ongoing COVID-19 response, recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Vibrant

With Federal and State Government support, Council's advocacy priorities will help foster a more vibrant Darebin, by ensuring we continue to create a city where all facilities, services and programs support a fair, equitable, and healthy life, that are all easily accessible to our people.

Sustainable

With Federal and State Government support, Council's advocacy priorities will continue to solidify Darebin as the leader in responding to the climate emergency, and in protecting, preserving and enhancing our natural environment, parklands, waterways, open spaces and biodiversity. Fundamental to creating a sustainable Darebin also requires Federal and State Government support towards local circular economy and recycling priorities, as well as local transport initiatives that can help us foster a genuine 20-minute accessible and sustainable city

These overarching advocacy and campaign themes, include the following five advocacy strategy key priority pillars:

- Environment, Climate Change and Circular Economy (Sustainable Darebin Advocacy Theme)
- Fairness and Equity (Liveable Darebin Advocacy Theme)
- Sustainable Transport and Connectivity (Sustainable Darebin Advocacy Theme)
- Community Wellbeing and Infrastructure (Prosperous and Liveable Darebin Advocacy Themes)
- Prosperous, Creative and Liveable Darebin (Prosperous and Liveable Darebin Advocacy Themes)

Theme 1 – Environment, climate change and circular economy

While Darebin has proudly remained a longstanding leader in advocating for outcomes on environmental and climate emergency issues, including through our Victorian Energy Collaboration (VECO) leadership- the largest ever emissions reduction project by local government in Australia- far more action and investment is required if we are to combat the impacts of the climate emergency, whilst enhancing local environmental, energy and climate change outcomes.

With Federal and State Government support, Council's advocacy priorities will continue to solidify Darebin as the leader in responding to the climate emergency, and in protecting, preserving and enhancing our natural environment, parklands, waterways, open spaces and biodiversity. Fundamental to creating a sustainable Darebin also requires Federal and State Government support towards local circular economy and recycling priorities, renewable energy, and complementary opportunities to grow our local sustainable economy and jobs.

Whether it be through Council's advocacy priorities for Darebin to be identified as the State's first Urban Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), to enhance the role of the Darebin Resource Recovery Centre as a regional circular economy processing facility for Melbourne's North, enhancing the water quality at Edwardes Lake, or to secure more funding for other local energy and ecological initiatives- Council's environment, climate change and circular economy advocacy agenda can help us create a more sustainable Darebin.

What we are advocating for:

- Climate Emergency, Climate Change and Renewable Energy
- Circular Economy, Recycling and Product Stewardship
- Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Taskforce
- Darebin's Open Space, Biodiversity and Waterways
- Protection of Strathallan as public land, and better management of the kangaroo population
- Integrated water management projects and initiatives
- A sustainable economy

Climate Emergency, Climate Change and Renewable Energy

The Context and Challenge

Impacts of Climate Change

“Climate change is already affecting every inhabited region across the globe with human influence contributing to many observed changes in weather and climate extremes.”³⁰

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its latest report found that under all scenarios modelled: “Global warming of 1.5° and 2° will be exceeded during 21st century unless deep reductions in CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions in the coming decade.”³¹

Reflecting on the task ahead the COP26 President Alok Sharma said:

*“We can now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 degrees alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action.”*³²

On 5 December 2016, Darebin City Council unanimously voted to recognise we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government.

We are already experiencing more severe and frequent floods, storms, mega bushfires, droughts and heatwaves in Australia. In Darebin we are experiencing more days of above 35C which disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable community members.

Monash University produced a heat vulnerability map for Melbourne that identified Reservoir and East Preston among the most at-risk suburbs. A lack of tree cover coupled with aging and social disadvantage puts the north of the municipality in the high-risk category.³³

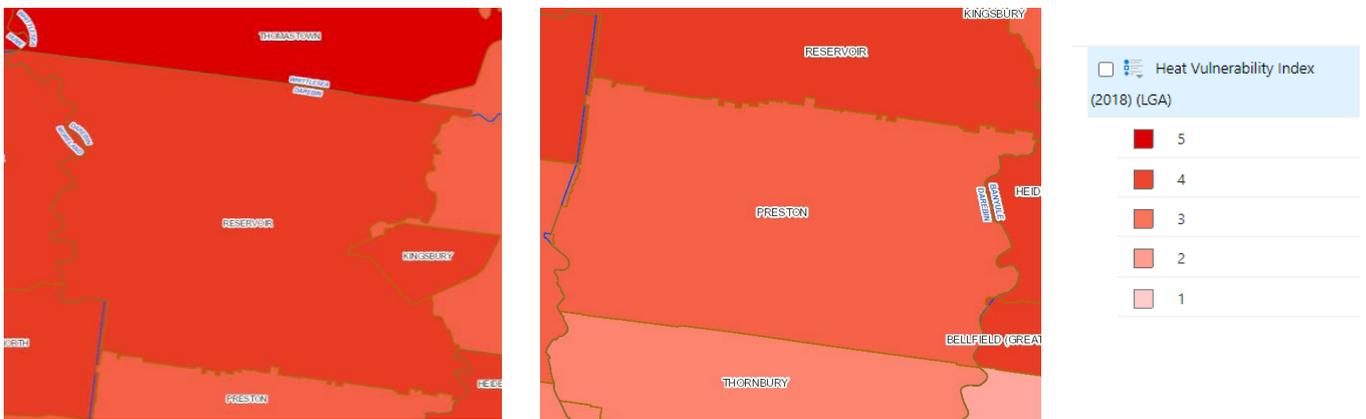


Figure 1. Heat Vulnerability Index- Reservoir and Preston source: Cooling and Greening Melbourne Interactive Map DELWP

Energy Generation

Energy production is the largest contributor to Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions with burning fossil fuels to produce electricity accounting for 33.6 per cent of the total emissions.³⁴

The way in which Australians will use energy and where its sourced from is going to change dramatically in the next 30 years however. The Draft 2022 Integrated System Plan published by The Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) identifies this once-in-a-century transformation, which includes:

- A rapid transition away from fossil fuel energy sources and significant uptake of renewables.
- Consumers moving away from natural gas and instead using electricity for heating and cooling, cooking and transportation (i.e. electric vehicles).
- Establishing a role for both grid scale and localised batteries for grid stability.
- Double the overall energy required to power our nation by 2050.
- 5 x more capacity of rooftop solar PV.
- New transmission networks to connect large scale renewables to the grid.³⁵

Identifying this enormous opportunity, a unified commitment with long term funding from federal and state governments is required to make this a successful and equitable change. There are considerable opportunities for Darebin to partner with federal and state government to address local energy grid challenges and to continue leading local and regional transformation efforts.

What Council is Doing

Darebin has demonstrated leadership on tackling climate change with several of flagship projects, programs and initiatives, with a demonstrated track record of emission reductions. Key examples of this are:

- Darebin was lead council for VECO – the Victorian Energy Collaboration which saw 46 Victorian Councils come together to switch to 100% renewable energy for their electricity contracts. This will save 260,000 tonnes of carbon emissions per annum and is the largest emissions reduction project ever undertaken in the local government sector in Australia.
- The Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre – currently being built – will be 6 green star certified, fully electric, and powered by renewable energy.
- Council delivers the Solar Saver program where Council installs Solar PV Systems on homes and community organisations. There are two streams one covering the upfront costs and the systems are paid back via rates, the other is a bulk buy scheme. Combined, Council has installed 1,196 installations totalling 6,139KW capacity since 2017.
- Electric vehicles - Darebin has already begun introducing electric and hybrid vehicles into its fleet and has installed public charging points for electric cars.
- In 2016 Darebin Council was the first government globally to declare that we are in a state of 'climate emergency'. Since then, more than 1,900 governments around the world have made similar declarations and committed to urgent action to address climate change.

Federal-State Government Assistance

In 2021, Council welcomed \$145,000 from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), to investigate the opportunity of Neighbourhood Battery energy storage systems, in partnership with local community group – Village Power. The project is expected to be completed by June 2022.

Building on the Victorian Government's funding for a feasibility study for a battery on this site, in November 2021, Shadow Federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen, and local Federal Member for Cooper, committed to investing in a community battery for Alphington, in partnership with local social enterprise Village Power, through a Federal Labor Government's *Power to the People Program*.

What Council is asking for

Darebin City Council is calling on the Federal and State Governments to deliver on their respective net zero targets as soon as possible, for our community to transition and thrive in a zero-carbon economy, whilst giving us all the best chance of avoiding the catastrophic impacts of climate change by:

Federal Government

- Investing in the national energy grid and unblocking the regulatory barriers to accelerate the transition to renewable energy and net zero emissions as quickly as possible, as outlined in the Darebin Climate Emergency Plan. Without national reform, Darebin and our community cannot fully realise the full economic and environmental benefits of 100% renewable energy.
- Support existing and new Darebin industries to switch to advanced electrical, renewable and circular economy technologies through expanding the *Advanced Manufacturing Growth Fund*, and to help build Darebin's sustainable economy.
- Through the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), fund the first Australia's first Urban Renewable Zone in Darebin, by investing in distributed energy resources and electrical technologies such as batteries, microgrids and electrified industrial plants, including through a new Village Neighbourhood Battery Power Project in Alphington. This first of a kind approach will demonstrate how existing inner city and urban residential, industrial and commercial precincts can transition to 100% renewable energy, whilst boosting local economic activity and energy outcomes.

State Government

- Building of the State Government's 6 existing Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) across regional Victoria, Darebin should be identified as Victoria's first Urban Renewable Energy Zone (UREZ).
- Allocate a minimum of \$1 million towards a new Darebin UREZ, through the creation of a broader \$20 million fund to support the creation and establishment of new Urban Renewable Energy Zones across Metropolitan Melbourne.
- Help kick-start the implementation of the Darebin UREZ by investing \$800,000 in the installation phase of the Village Power Neighbourhood Batter project in Alphington.
- Through an identified Darebin UREZ Zone, roll-out Victoria's first electrified manufacturing precinct in Darebin with investment to support businesses and manufactures to install behind-the-metre renewables, and to replace aging gas equipment with proven, efficient electrical technologies such as heat pumps.

Strategic Partnerships

- Collaboration through strategic partnerships to recognise and solidify Darebin as a Urban Renewable Energy Zone (UREZ), including with local businesses, industrial precincts, the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, La Trobe University and through the National Employment and Innovation Cluster (NEIC), and other local organisations and forums.

Circular Economy, Recycling and Product Stewardship

The Context and Challenge

The global price for recyclable materials plummeted in 2018 with China and other countries restricting what recycled materials they would accept from overseas, sparking a 'recycling crisis'. This has forced many developed countries to rethink their approach to waste and recycling, develop new markets domestically, and move towards circular economy solutions.

The recycling crisis led to the closing of Melbourne's largest recycling processing facility. Darebin, like other Council's was temporarily forced to send recyclables to landfill. This closure highlighted the vulnerability of statewide recycling infrastructure and the need for a changed approach at the local, statewide, and national level.

All levels of government will need to work together to transition to a circular economy and while there are challenges there is also significant economic opportunities.

The Australian Government's ban on exporting waste via the *Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020*, creates an opportunity to expand the resource recovery sector, create jobs and transition to a circular economy.

In 2020, the Federal Government declared Recycling and Clean Energy as one of its six National Manufacturing Priorities on the basis that these sectors are identified as areas that Australia has comparative advantage and strategic importance for manufacturing.

To this point, the CSIRO noted that maximising benefits realised through the circular economy would "create 9.2 jobs per 10,000 tonnes of waste, compared with only 2.8 jobs for the same amount of waste sent to landfill" and that "increasing Australia's recovery rate by just 5 per cent would add an estimated \$1 billion to GDP"⁴.

In 2020 the Victorian Government released its plan for a Circular Economy, the Recycling Victoria: A new economy which steps out the changes planned to cut waste, boost recycling and create jobs. Transitioning to a circular economy will potentially boost Victoria's economy by up to \$6.7 billion and create 3,900 new jobs¹⁷.

The shift to a circular economy is vital for environmental and economic sustainability and can play a pivotal role in driving COVID-19 economic recovery efforts, particularly across Darebin.

Beginning with Federal and State investment to investigate and develop a regional circular economy hub in Darebin- that could enable start-ups, social enterprises, circular manufacturers and community groups to drive a circular economy and provide inclusive jobs for our diverse community- we can provide new recycling solutions for the community and businesses, help to reduce waste sent to landfill, prevent illegal dumping, and create more local jobs through the sustainable economy.

A new regional circular economy hub based in Darebin could also drive solutions for problematic waste like textiles, and other priority materials. The hub could form the basis for a Federal and State partnership within Darebin, to develop and trial product stewardship programs to take a much wider range of products – similar to the current National TV and Computer Recycling scheme, or the new Victorian Container Deposit Scheme which will commence from 2023.

What Council is Doing

Council's *Waste and Recycling Strategy*¹² was adopted in 2020 which sets out long term objectives and an Action Plan to achieve them. Some of the key actions we are currently delivering are:

- Expanding our food and garden waste service.
- Improving the Darebin Resource Recovery Centre (DRRC).
- Localised textile waste recycling – feasibility study.
- Working with other Councils to explore waste processing options and group procurement.
- Working with other Councils to investigate improved options for recycling in large multi-unit dwellings.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The Australian Government will invest \$190 million into the Recycling Modernisation Fund, leveraging over \$800 million of recycling infrastructure investment from states and territories and industry. This will drive a billion-dollar transformation of Australia's waste and recycling capacity¹⁸.

Recycling Victoria: A new economy will invest over \$300 million to transform our recycling sector. It will drive investment in world class infrastructure and technology, make our state's future recycling system more sustainable, create cutting-edge local industries and support thousands of new local jobs—positioning Victoria as a global leader¹⁷. This funding is assisting Victorian Councils, including Darebin, to roll-out kerbside reforms that are required under the new *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling Act) Act 2021*.

What Council is asking for

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal and State Government support to:

- Invest \$2 million to develop a regional circular economy hub in Darebin, including through a business case to consider opportunities through the Darebin Resource and Recovery Centre.
- Address waste and recycling issues, including Federal and State government intervention to address issues outside the remit of councils.
- Increase investment to support transition to a circular economy in order to reduce waste, improve resource recovery and create new jobs, including through the rollout of Victoria's kerbside reforms for local councils that are required through the new *Circular Economy 2021 Act*.
- Turn off the 'tap' of waste by requiring and creating incentives for higher use of recycled materials and by phasing out problematic and unnecessary waste.
- Expand Federal and State product stewardship schemes and introduce a new materials levy to drive industry change towards more sustainable product packaging.
- Introduce a Solar Panel and battery product stewardship schemes as a priority.
- Ban the import and production of hard-to-recycle materials (*except for essential needs such as some medical uses*).
- Co-invest in major regional waste facilities to help attract and build new markets, including a business case to consider opportunities through the Darebin Resource and Recovery Centre.
- Fund technology and research that leads to an advanced domestic circular economy sector and positions Australia, including across Darebin, as a leading destination in this emerging sector.
- Partner with Local Government to help guide State and Federal policy and investment decisions that support a circular economy, recycling, product packaging and waste reform opportunities.
- Support Council to address broader waste and illegal dumping issues.

Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Taskforce

The Context and Challenge

Edwardes Lake Park, located in Reservoir, is of regional significance, and for over 100 years has served a critical role in providing the 'lungs' for Darebin's community.

The Lake is one of the largest in Melbourne, and forms part of the Edwardes Lake parklands, with a water storage capacity of about 85 million litres (85 megalitres), and an area of over six hectares.

With over 135,000 visitors per year, the parklands and lake provide a sanctuary for aquatic wildlife with walking tracks, picnic areas and play spaces for our diverse communities to enjoy. The Lake, the wetlands, and Edgars Creek also provide for an important urban habitat corridor for local wildlife including growling grass frogs, nankeen night herons and Eastern long neck turtles.

Sadly, assessments have classified Edwardes Lake as having poor water quality, highlighting the risk to public health and threat to local wildlife.

Increased stormwater pollution events and frequent algae blooms continue to degrade the natural environment and aquatic ecosystems at Edwardes Lake. These causes of poor water quality are likely to be from urban sources such as roads, roofs, gardens, leaf litter, pet faeces and construction sites as well as sewage, industrial waste and other external influences across the catchment throughout Darebin and Whittlesea. Climate change continues to have an increasing impact on the lake, with the likelihood of frequent flooding events and warmer temperatures over summer.

Water quality assessments have determined that an integrated water management approach across the catchment is required to coordinate and align priorities across agencies to mitigate the impact of urbanisation, population growth and climate change on water quality at Edwardes Lake.

Significant opportunities exist for Federal Government and State Government partnership with Council, including through the newly formed Edwardes Lake Taskforce, to help us protect, preserve and enhance to open space, water quality, recreational, visitation, environmental and biodiversity opportunities across the Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake now, and into the future, for the residents of Darebin, as well as the broader northern region.

What Council is Doing

Darebin Council is leading the establishment of the Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Task Force, with representation from water authorities, including Melbourne Water, Traditional Owners, community groups and local government. The purpose of this is to coordinate and advance initiatives across the Edgars Creek Catchment to enable and inspire the transformation of the Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake with a whole of catchment approach to improve water quality, build flood resilience and enhance the natural environment.

The Task Force takes an evidence-based approach to priorities, and to identify projects within the catchment that will include capital works initiatives, monitoring data collations, education and behaviour change and revegetation and ecological restoration.

Over the next 12 months, the Taskforce will be considering and seeking to advance numerous priorities, including through:

- *Capital works Initiatives*
 - A first priority is the Ruthven Stormwater Wetland, located within the Edgars Creek Catchment. Council has recently removed 8,630m² of impervious area (in asphalt, roofing) to reduce the urban heat island effect on the project site. There is a plan to construct a wetland to mitigate the impact of stormwater on Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake.
 - Further work across the catchment will be determined with a prioritisation study of Water Sensitive Urban Design Infrastructure across the Catchment to increase the amount of stormwater treatment assets within the catchment.
- *Monitoring data collations*
 - Collect, collate and centralise a co-ordinated database to determine current water quality status so that action orientated goals can be informed across agencies across the catchment.
- *Education and behaviour change*
 - Host community events to launch the work of the Taskforce and generate community interest and involvement.
 - Develop and implement a targeted educational and behaviour change program with business and industries within the catchment.
- *Revegetation and ecological restoration*
 - Carry out a feasibility study to re-naturalise and increase access to areas of the Edgars Creek corridor. It is hoped that large stretches of the Edgars Creek which is currently lined with concrete will be transformed into a more natural creek line with abundant flora and fauna. Access to the corridor where it is currently fenced off to the public could be increased with trails for people to enjoy a more natural environment.

To further draw attention and celebrate the role of Edwardes Lake, as part of its 100-year celebrations, Council has partnered with the Victorian Government, Multicultural Arts Victoria and the local community, to hold the FUSE Festival's 'Out of the Park Picnic' on 27 March 2022 at the Lake.

Diversifying the activity and visitation experience at Edwardes Lake through arts, cultural and community events, can also play a key role in the Lake continuing to support community health, wellbeing and resilience outcomes, as well as to help create and support new jobs across Reservoir. In this regard future opportunities around the Edwardes Lake Boatshed, the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, as well as extending Tram 11, can continue to be considered amongst other initiatives.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Significant opportunities exist for Federal Government and State Government partnership with Council, including through the newly formed Edwardes Lake Taskforce, to help us protect, preserve and enhance to open space, water quality, recreational, visitation, environmental and biodiversity opportunities across the Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake now, and into the future, for the residents of Darebin, as well as the broader northern region.

Leveraging various Federal and State funding programs, including through the State Government's the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Melbourne Water, as well as the Department of Jobs Precinct and Regions, can help in funding new projects, initiatives and programs across the precinct to enhance sustainability and community outcomes.

What Council is asking for

Darebin City Council is calling for Federal and State Government support to:

- Partner with Darebin City Council, through the Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Taskforce, to identify and invest in new projects, initiatives and programs that can help support new environmental sustainability, water, biodiversity, health, wellbeing and socio-economic opportunities across the Edwards Lake Precinct.
- Consider the role of an expanded Reservoir Revitalisation Board in helping to facilitate new investments across Edgars Creek and Edwards Lake, including through the Edwardes Lake Boatshed and Tram 11 extension proposal.

Darebin's Open Space, Biodiversity and Waterways

The Context and Challenge

Darebin's *Breathing Space- Open Space Strategy*⁴⁶, guides Council's work in maintain and enhancing around our 200 local parks, district parks, regional parks, creek corridors, golf courses, nature reserves and community gardens, which equate to around 790 hectares of public open space across the municipality.

Through Council's work and investments to maintain and enhance local open spaces, Council seeks to respond to, and make provision for a range of challenges and opportunities including the climate emergency, urban island heat effect, biodiversity, nature, community stewardship, social cohesion, connectivity- as well as opportunities around recreational, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Council's vision is to create a sustainable future that responds to the climate emergency, through a range of measures which include with more and better public open spaces. A key element of this approach also includes Council working to recognise the traditional owners and their role in renewing open spaces, through their continuing connection the land and local waterways.

However, with Darebin's population anticipated to continue growing and densifying over future years, the role of local open spaces will continue to play an increasingly important role in helping us foster a more resilient community.

Furthermore, there continues to be a number of suburbs and pockets across Darebin who do not have households that are within 500 meters of a local open space precinct, including 25% of households in Preston West, 15% of households in Kingsbury, 9.5% in Alphington-Fairfield, 8% in Reservoir West and 7% in Preston Central⁴⁶.

In addition, numerous parts of Darebin continue to remain highly vulnerable to the urban island heat effect, including across parts of Reservoir and Preston.

Significant opportunities exist for Federal and State investment across Darebin, to enhance local open space, tree canopy and biodiversity outcomes for all across the municipality, and that can respond to the needs and demands of growing and diversifying local neighbourhoods.

Particularly opportunity exists through Edgars Creek and Edwards Park Lake, the proposed Ruthven Wetlands, Bundoora Park, as well as numerous other parklands and creek corridors throughout the municipality.

What Council is Doing

As identified in the Council Plan 2021-2025, Council is working to protect our natural environment and biodiversity by significantly improving water quality in Edwardes Lake, increasing tree canopy coverage in our parks, residential areas and retail precincts, and enhancing understorey planting.

Led through Council's *Breathing Space- Open Space Strategy*, Council continues to identify and invest in numerous open space and park upgrades annually, through which Federal and State Government support continues to be welcomed.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges and appreciates the over \$1 million State Government in recent investments towards local parks and pocket parks including Oakover Road (\$400,000), Ruthven Play Space (\$200,000), Penders Play Space (\$300,000) and Edwardes Lake (\$275,000).

What Council is asking for

Darebin City Council welcomes Federal and State support for:

- Funding to help enhance local pocket park, parklands, tree canopy, opens space, waterways, flora, fauna and biodiversity projects and outcomes across Darebin, consistent with Council's *Breathing Space- Open Space Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy and RAPID Canopy and Rewilding Programs*
- Engagement with Council, including through the Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Taskforce, to invest in and improve the water quality at Edwardes Lake, and enhance facilities, amenities, flora, fauna and biodiversity outcomes across the precinct
- Investment towards Council's various other open space and biodiversity priorities including for the Re-imagining Ruthven Master Plan, Strathallan Wildlife Corridor, re-wilding of Cheddar Road, Bundoora Park, All Nations Park, and other local opportunities.
- Building off the State Government's 'Greening of the West' Initiative, funding towards an expanded rollout of a new 'Greening of the North' initiative, which can help facilitate more trees across the northern region, to help create a cooler, more sustainable and healthier Melbourne's north, through urban forestation initiatives
- Funding for a dedicated resource to assist with Traditional Owner Land Projects, such as Land Back, Renaming in Language and indigenous consultation on future projects.
- Investment towards safety audits, and studies of, additional park lighting to improve community safety and perceptions of safety.
- State Government investment for the maintenance and enhancement of state-owned land, particularly state-owned land adjoining railway corridors and council owned parcels of land.

Protection of Strathallan as public land and enable better management of the kangaroo population

The Context and Challenge

Gresswell Forest, Gresswell Hill, the Habitat Link, Strathallan Golf Course and Latrobe Universities Wildlife Reserve are all important flora and fauna reserves.

These interfacing and inter-connected reserves are home to populations of kangaroos, and where unfenced, form part of a broader network of wildlife and biodiversity corridors within Darebin, and for the broader northern region, allowing for kangaroo populations to migrate.

These kangaroo populations naturally fluctuate, increasing when conditions are suitable and falling in drought and other adverse conditions. The kangaroo populations naturally forage for food, and it is this natural foraging which is important to maintain their natural instincts of the sustainment of their population.

Both Parks Victoria and Latrobe University monitor Kangaroo populations, and when required provide assistance to injured wildlife, with Council managing a number of other reserves in close proximity of the Gresswell, Stathallan and La Trobe Wildlife Reserve network.

Council's reserves have continued to be managed for floristic diversity, with the aim to bolster native populations of indigenous plant species, and to control, and where possible, to eliminate a suite of weeds. This vegetation is the natural food source for kangaroos. However, if kangaroo populations are unmanaged and rise, it creates an imbalance within the local ecosystem, and leads to a deterioration in natural vegetation as well as animal welfare.

The ongoing risks experienced by local kangaroo populations across these Darebin based wildlife reserves and corridors, has remained the fluctuating, rising and unmanaged kangaroo population numbers, in the context of local biodiversity and fauna capacity, as well as broader northern regional human population growth, densification and demands on local parklands and open space corridors.

In 2017 for example, to address density issues within Gresswell Forest, Parks Victoria planning on implementing a cull to immediately reduce the kangaroo population to a sustainable level, and to address health issues affecting the local kangaroo population. At the time, the kangaroo population was 107, however the carrying capacity of the Gresswell Forest Reserve at the time was deemed to be no more than 30. While the proposed cull at the time was abandoned, Council has continued to encourage the implementation and monitoring of non-lethal population management measures, including through the development of a *Greater Gresswell Forest Land Management, Kangaroo Population and Wildlife Protection Plan*, and an *Urban Kangaroo Welfare and Conservation Plan for Bundoora and Macleod*.

Also critical to sustaining current and future local kangaroo populations, is the ongoing retention and management of the Strathallan Golf Course as public open space, which was originally intended to serve as a buffer between local conservation reserves and networks, and residential development when then land was first declared as public open space by the Victorian Government. In 2017 a petition was provided with over 4,700 signatures to La Trobe University, for the ongoing retention of this land as open space, which provides for other inherent environmental, ecological and biodiversity value for local kangaroos and other flora and fauna.

Given wild kangaroo populations, and their associated management are guided by government legislation and regulation, it is critical that State Government, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Parks Victoria, La Trobe University and the local community are all engaged to work together in good faith to support and sustain these local wildlife reserves and corridors, in the context of supporting and preserving local kangaroos and biodiversity outcomes¹¹.

What Council is Doing

Council's June 2017 Reports¹¹ contained a number of key elements and actions which Council has been leading and engaging with amongst relevant stakeholders, to support and facilitate the protection and preservation of the local kangaroo populations and wildlife corridors, some of which included through:

- Reaffirming Council's supports for the retention of the open space provided by the Strathallan Golf Course and re-emphasises the original intentions for this land to serve as a buffer between local conservation reserves and residential development when this land was first declared public open space by the Victorian Government.
- Development of a *Greater Gresswell Forest Land Management, Kangaroo Population and Wildlife Protection Plan* and an *Urban Kangaroo Welfare and Conservation Plan for Bundoora and Macleod*.
- Enhanced tree and vegetation protection schedule across all the parkland areas.
- A grassland management plan for Kangaroos and a feed plan for droughts and summer months.
- Consideration, development and resources for a Friends of Gresswell Kangaroos Group.
- The removal or redesign of Colourbond fences and any current obstructions between these parkland areas.
- The creation of safe a wildlife underpass or crossing points for Kangaroos between La Trobe University's bushland and the habitat link.
- The development of a section 173 agreement between La Trobe University and Darebin Council to ensure permanent protection of access to grasslands for Kangaroos on the Habitat Link and the Strathallan golf course.
- Any required updating of current planning zoning and Darebin's MSS to limit land use in line with Darebin's Kangaroo protection plan.
- Options for state government funds to support the proposed local kangaroo protection plan.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council has been working and engaging in good faith over several years to help bring relevant partners together, including as outlined in a June 2017 Council Reports¹¹, which sought continued engagement between State Government, DELWP, Parks Victoria, La Trobe University and local community stakeholders, including the Save Strathallan Open Space Community Coalition Inc., the Springthorpe Owners Corporation and representatives from Strathallan Golf Club, as well as local wildlife and rescue groups, to help foster and support local open space, wildlife reserve and biodiversity outcomes for the local kangaroo population and broader community.

What Council is asking for

Darebin City Council calls on the State Government, DELWP, Parks Victoria and La Trobe University to:

- Partner with Council and the community to protect Strathallan as public land to serve as a buffer between local conservation reserves and networks, and residential development.
- Partner with Council and the community around the development and implementation of a *Greater Gresswell Forest Land Management, Kangaroo Population and Wildlife Protection Plan*, and an *Urban Kangaroo Welfare and Conservation Plan for Bundoora and Macleod*.
- Provide investment and funding- including through the State Government's various DELWP suburban parkland, open space and biodiversity funding streams, - to help protect and enhance local kangaroo and biodiversity corridors throughout Gresswell Forest, Gresswell Hill, the Habitat Link, Strathallan Golf Course and Latrobe Universities Wildlife Reserve.

Integrated Water Management Projects and Initiatives

The Context and Challenge

Management of stormwater and drainage infrastructure continues to remain a growing challenge across Darebin, due to the historical, and ongoing rate of population, development, and densification across the municipality, and surrounding local government areas.

Increases in impervious surfaces, such as concrete and roofs, combined with the evolving impacts of climate change, continue to impact open spaces and increase the volume of stormwater runoff on privately owned and council owned land.

This in turn increases challenges and risks associated with flooding for residential, industrial, commercial and Council owned properties.

Flooding on roads also poses a significant safety and productivity risk for commuters, public transport and other road users.

It's becoming increasingly evident that Integrated Water Management solutions are required as a priority to combat increased stormwater runoff and reducing underdeveloped spaces to install drains, improve water quality respond to the consequences of climate change.

Significant Federal and State Government opportunities exist to partner with council, to provide funding to develop Darebin's Integrated Water Management Plan (IWM), deliver, undertake feasibility IWM studies and design, and to invest in shovel ready IWM projects.

What Council is Doing

Council invests a total of approximately \$1 million per annum for drainage capital projects to address water quality issues, flood mitigation and asset renewal.

Darebin frequently seeks partnerships with State Government, Melbourne Water, Stormwater Shepherds and other external organisations, in an effort to increase their respective contributions and investments, where strategic goals may be aligned around local priorities.

Darebin is a member of the DELWP Yarra IWM Forum, along with many other Council's in our region, water authorities and Traditional Owners.

The Ruthven Wetland Project in Reservoir has been unanimously endorsed by the Yarra IWM Forum, and Council is seeking funding for a feasibility study and detailed design. Council will also be seeking funding to construct the wetland over the coming year.

Darebin has also established the Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Taskforce, to address historical water quality issues in Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake. The Taskforce members include a partnership of various Councils within the catchment, EPA, Yarra Valley Water, Melbourne Water, various community groups & Traditional Owners.

Council has recently obtained updated flood mapping for the entire municipality to inform future development and prioritise Council flood mitigation projects.

Council has commissioned the Stormwater Prioritisation Report 2017, which has identified ten locations within Darebin for large scale Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) projects. Due to limited funding, Council has only been able to deliver one project so far. The projects will benefit Darebin, but also contribute to reducing the urban-heat island effect in the northern region of Melbourne³⁹.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council remains extremely appreciative of Melbourne Water's jointly funded the Dole Reserve Stormwater Harvest Wetland, contributing \$1.7 million towards the project. The new wetland and underground storage system, harvests water from Melbourne Water's stormwater drain to use for irrigation at 7 sports ovals, saving approximately 25ML of potable water per year. The project is due to be completed in September 2022.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal Government and State Government support to:

- Partner with Darebin to develop an Integrated Water Management Plan (IWM), to replace previous drainage strategies, including the Darebin Drainage Strategy 1998 and Watershed Strategy 2015-2025.
- Provide funding to undertake local sub-catchment scale feasibility studies & deliver designs for Darebin's Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD), Integrated Water Management Plan (IWM), drainage, stormwater harvest, flood mitigation & water quality projects across the municipality.
- Engagement and investment via the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, and Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Taskforce, to support water quality and rehabilitation projects across Edwardes Lake.
- Funding towards a feasibility study, and construction of, the proposed Ruthven Wetlands at Glasgow Avenue in Reservoir.
- Provide capital funding to deliver shovel ready projects, including at Arch Gibson Reserve's Retention Wetland, and other priority projects throughout Darebin

The Sustainable Economy

The Context and Challenge

By acting to implement practical measures that respond to the climate emergency and in moving towards a circular economy, Darebin can be an emerging sustainable economy by attracting and enhancing local environmental related businesses, jobs and skills opportunities.

Circular Economy

The Australian Government's ban on exporting waste via the *Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020*, creates a once in a generation opportunity to expand the resource recovery sector, including across Darebin, and to create more local jobs as we transition to a circular economy.

The CSIRO has stated that maximising benefits realised through the circular economy would “create 9.2 jobs per 10,000 tonnes of waste, compared with only 2.8 jobs for the same amount of waste sent to landfill” and that “increasing Australia's recovery rate by just 5 per cent would add an estimated \$1 billion to GDP”¹⁴.

Across Darebin, Council collects approximately 40,000 tonnes of waste, with 57% of this waste on average sent to landfill and 43% recovered via kerbside recycling, green waste and drop off points or transfer stations¹².

Whilst recycling awareness and behaviour has been improving across Darebin - including during 2020-21, with 63% of local kerbside collection waste diverted from landfill largely due to an increased number in local DOGO bin collections, and with the volume of waste to landfill reducing from 153kg per person in 2019-20 to 114kg per person in 2020-21¹⁰ - opportunity exists for the Federal and State Governments to partner with Darebin to help improve local circular economy and associated job outcomes, including through the Darebin Resource and Recovery Centre.

With the number of local people working across manufacturing, electricity, gas water and waste services related jobs in Darebin making up 4,668 local jobs as of 2016 (or 6.57% of local jobs), and the number of local businesses associated with manufacturing, electricity, gas, water and waste services rising from 543 in 2011 to 554 in 2016⁶, Darebin is well positioned through our Darebin Reservice and Recovery Centre, as well as broader Newlands Road and other industrial precincts, to help facilitate more local circular economy related investment, businesses and jobs.

Renewable Energy

With respect to renewable energy, an Australian Government report in 2021 noted that nationally, manufacturing is the third largest consumer of energy, representing 17% of all energy consumed¹⁵. The sector relies on natural gas as its largest source of energy, and a transition to renewable energy for the sector is essential if the zero net emission targets are to be achieved.

As acknowledged in *Darebin's Climate Emergency Plan*¹³, the commercial and industrial sectors (using electricity or gas) across Darebin are the largest source of Darebin community emissions, contributing 46% or 533 kilotonnes in 2016.

However in partnership with Federal and State Governments, and through Council led local initiatives, including our target of zero greenhouse gas emissions for Darebin by 2030 and our leadership through the Victorian Energy Collaboration, Darebin is strategically positioned to help foster and grow the sustainable economy, through investment attraction, partnerships and support of local businesses and organisations that can help generate, supply or manufacture new renewable energy technologies, infrastructure and power, to help reduce our community's emissions whilst growing local jobs and skills outcomes.

The shift to a circular economy and renewable energy is vital for environmental and economic sustainability and can play a pivotal role in driving COVID-19 economic recovery efforts across Darebin.

What Council is Doing

Council has set a target of zero greenhouse gas emissions for Darebin by 2030 and is actively supporting a shift to a circular economy and a massive reduction in the level of waste going to landfill.

In the 2021-2025 Council Plan, Council committed to reduce waste and stimulate a local circular economy, where waste resources are re-used rather than discarded and has identified that the circular economy as a principle underpinning the Economic Development Strategy.

Council has also committed to increase food waste recycling through Council's food and garden waste service and is, with the support of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR), developing an Industry Attraction Plan for Reservoir that will establish a vision for employment and manufacturing in the north of the City.

Along with Darebin leading and bringing together 46 Victorian Councils in 2021 to launch the Victorian Energy Collaboration (VECO)- the largest ever emissions reduction project by local government in Australia, to power 45 per cent of all Victorian Council electricity with renewables, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 260,000 tonnes of CO₂-e every year⁴, significant opportunity also exists through Darebin's Resource and Recovery Centre, to help support, foster and grow Darebin and Melbourne's northern sustainable, renewable and circular economies.

Federal-State Government Assistance

In 2020, the Federal Government declared Recycling and Clean Energy as one of its six National Manufacturing Priorities on the basis that these sectors are identified as areas that Australia has comparative advantage and strategic importance for manufacturing.

The Australian Government has also established the goal of Australia recycling around 645,000 additional tonnes of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres each year by mid-2024¹⁶.

The State Government's *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* provides for stronger regulation of the state's waste and recycling sector, and for more recycling less waste and landfill. Accompanying these reforms, the State has committed \$515 million towards the transformation of the waste and recycling sectors through the 'Recycling Victoria: a new economy' program¹⁷.

With respect to renewable energy, the Australian Government, through the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), has committed \$1.6 billion in new funding to invest in projects and initiatives that align with the Australian Government's Technology Investment Roadmap¹⁸.

The Victorian Government has committed \$1.6 billion, including \$540 million to establish six new Renewable Energy Zones, to create new renewable energy hubs across the state, improve grid infrastructure, decarbonise the energy system and reduce emissions¹⁹.

What Council is asking for

Darebin calls on the Federal and State Governments to:

- Co-invest in new major regional waste facilities to help attract and build new markets, including through a business case to consider opportunities through a business case for the Darebin Resource and Recovery Centre.
- Partner with Darebin Council as part of the rollout of local waste, recycling, and FOGO reforms.
- Prioritise Darebin's job creation and industry transition through the circular economy as part of COVID-19 recovery efforts.
- Partner with Darebin and other Councils in Melbourne's north, to support broader policy and investment decisions around circular economy, recycling, product packaging and waste reform opportunities, including through a potential circular economy hub in Darebin.
- Fund technology, research and training pathways that facilitate and advanced domestic circular economy and renewable energy sectors, and position Darebin as a leading investment attracting destination for circular economy and renewable energy businesses, jobs and skills.
- Invest in a pilot program, as a catalyst, to driving Darebin's manufacturing sector fast-track the move away from gas as the sector's primary source of energy, and to transition towards renewable energy.
- Identify and designate Darebin as Victoria's first '*Urban Renewable Energy Zone*' and provide accompanying funding to support local renewable energy infrastructure, projects and initiatives, including community batteries, solar panel rollout and more.

Theme 2 – Fairness and equity

While Council was extremely proud of Darebin's suburb of Northcote being named as Melbourne's most liveable suburb, the reality is that both Northcote, as well as many other suburbs and pockets across Darebin, many in our community continue to experience significant challenges and disadvantage, particularly across Darebin's northern suburbs of Preston and Reservoir.

With Federal and State Government support, Council's fairness advocacy priorities will help foster a fairer Darebin, by ensuring we continue to create a city where all of our socio-economic community cohorts have equitable access to better facilities, services and programs that support a healthier and happier life for all of our people as one Darebin, with no suburb left behind.

Whether it be through Council's advocacy priorities for greater recognition for Aboriginal People, support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, women and gender equality, mental health, peri-natal, family violence, social housing, homelessness or other vital facilities and services that respond to local socio-economic needs and disadvantage, Council's fairness advocacy agenda can help us foster a more liveable and equitable Darebin- where no suburb and no resident is left behind.

What we are advocating for:

- Recognition of, and for, Aboriginal People
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Women and Gender Equity
- COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Response and Recovery
- JobSeeker, Minimum Wage and Socio-Economic Disadvantage
- Mental Health Infrastructure, Services and Resources
- Young Families and Peri-Natal Hub, Services and Support
- Social, Affordable Housing and Homelessness
- Family Violence
- Reducing the Harm of Gambling and Alcohol
- Aged and Elderly
- People with a disability
- Multicultural and Diverse Communities
- LGBTQI+ Communities
- Community Safety

Recognition of, and for, Aboriginal People

The Context and Challenge

Darebin is home to one of the highest proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities who live within metropolitan Melbourne. According to 2016 Census data, 1,165 Aboriginal and Torres Strait people live in Darebin, making up 0.8% of the total population⁶.

Council recognises that Darebin is a significant gathering place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the home of several significant Aboriginal peak bodies, organisations (*17 of which are in Darebin*) and businesses. It has also been a site for significant events in post-contact history, including the 'signing' of the 'Batman Treaty'.

Aboriginal people nationally and in Darebin³⁶, continue to experience structural and systemic discrimination and disadvantaged relative to other Australians across all life metrics, including life expectancy, health, employment, education, out-of-home-care and incarceration. This requires both urgent and sustained attention and partnership from all levels of government.

Council has continued to remain actively involved in advocacy to support outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, because the issues they experience are local and national significance and affect all of us. There cannot be a fair Australia, or a fair Darebin, without justice and recognition of, and for, Aboriginal people³⁶.

What Council is Doing

As outlined in the Statement of Commitment to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2019, Darebin Council has a strong commitment to recognition of, and justice for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Council is committed to supporting positive, meaningful change to address and redress historical and current injustices and continued systemic discrimination.

Darebin has an active association with the Traditional Owners and custodians, the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people, as well as Aboriginal community leaders and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. Council formally engages through the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee (DAAC) to advice on Council's policies and programs.

In addition to a large program of work with and for Aboriginal people and communities delivered through the Council Plan 2021-25 and Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2017-27, Council has strong advocacy positions on issues that affect the Aboriginal community, including opposing Australia's national celebration being held on 26 January.

A key element to Darebin's advocacy approach is a focus on increasing community understanding and creating opportunities for dialogue and exchange; making sure Aboriginal community members have opportunities to tell the truth and other community members the opportunity to listen to this truth.

Council acknowledges its educational role and its responsibility to take deliberate action to ensure that the broader community more fully understands the experiences and stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people and the true account of our nation's history³⁶.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Since 2008, Australian governments (States and Federal) have worked to deliver better health, education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to eliminate the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Council commends the Victorian Government working towards a treaty or treaties with Aboriginal Victorians through the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018, the establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly to discuss the framework and elements needed to negotiate treaty³⁷.

The establishment of first Truth and justice commission Yoorrook Justice Commission, to look into past and ongoing injustices experienced by Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria in all areas of life since colonisation, including reparation.

Council has also welcomed engagement and support through a range of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Initiatives, including through the State Government's over \$5.3 million contribution towards the construction of a new Aboriginal Women and Girls Sport and Wellness Centre at the Aboriginal Advancement League in Thornbury in 2022, which will also provide a new Fitzroy Stars, with the support of Hands on Health Australia.

What Council is asking for

Darebin City Council is calling on the Federal and State Government for:

- *Justice for Aboriginal people and respect for their sovereignty* - Council calls on all levels of government to seek guidance from Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and respect their leadership towards self-determination towards a fairer Australian society.
- *Truth telling and truth-listening* - Council calls on all levels of Government to continue to support truth-telling and truth-listening as the Victorian State Government is currently doing through the and to start a truth-telling and truth-listening process at the national level.
- *January 26* - Council calls on the State and National Governments to lead a debate, in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, in seeking an alternative date for celebration, and how to acknowledge January 26th that is respectful inclusive for all.
- *Black Lives Matter* - Council calls on Local, State and National Governments to act in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and continued Aboriginal fights for their rights. This includes an end to deaths in custody and reduction in the high levels of incarceration rates, family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and children being taken away from their families into out of home care as a result of discriminatory policies and practices (including the low age of criminal responsibility).
- *Closing the Gap* - We call on all tiers of government to work together to support achieving the Closing the Gap targets while respecting the right to self-determination We call on local, National and State Governments to work together more closely and in genuine dialogue with Aboriginal people on systems reform that recognizes sovereignty, self-determination and empowerment through shared decision-making, equitable funding and cohesive policies³⁸.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The Context and Challenge

Darebin is a proudly multicultural and linguistically diverse community with over 33% of Darebin residents (around 55,000 people) overseas born (migrant)⁶. This figure includes newly arrived people from refugees and asylum-seeking backgrounds, with many still having families residing in parts of the world that continue to experience conflict, displacement and humanitarian crises.

As of 2020-2021, Darebin was identified as being home to around 250 asylum seekers on bridging visa E, with this number likely having increased in 2022. However, these figures do not include other asylum seeker cohorts who are on different bridging visas and which include people seeking asylum that came by plane or applied for protection visa whilst on other visas such as visitor or student visas⁴⁰.

Darebin is home to several rooming houses that specifically house people seeking asylum who have been released into the community, making it their first community and home in Australia.

Federal Government's policy and treatment of refugees who come to Australia seeking protection is widely considered as the most punitive of policy approaches, aimed to deter vulnerable people escaping dangerous parts of the world from seeking safety.

For Darebin Council, advocating for the right of refugees and people seeking asylum does not only respond to needs of significant part of the Darebin community, it also responds to Council's broader commitments to human rights and social justice.

Currently, around 100,000 people are living in limbo for years while their applications for asylum are stuck in the system. This includes hundreds of people in offshore and onshore detention centres⁴⁰.

In recent years, most people seeking asylum have been released into the community, but their difficulties do not stop there. People seeking asylum who live in the community are also denied access to several critical support services such as Centrelink, Medicare, public housing, homelessness, education, mental health and food. Many are forced into destitution, with little support or settlement assistance as they wait for the government to process their claims.

Even when found to be refugees, under current policy, refugees who come by boat are forced to live on temporary protection visas forever. There is an increasing number of people seeking asylum by plane, as they are now waiting years for their claims to be determined. People who come to Australia with a valid visa (for example, on a tourist or student visa) but then seek protection face fewer restrictions than those who come by boat, but still face enormous challenges⁴⁰.

In addition, people from refugees and asylum-seeking backgrounds, including those who have been granted permanent residency or citizenship, are facing numerous challenges preventing them from having equal opportunity to belong, contribute and participate in social, cultural, learning and economic life. Poverty, discrimination, and inequality are some of the many factors that contribute to exclusion of people from refugees and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

The continuous reduction of the number of humanitarian visas granted by the Federal government under Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Program remains a significant concern. The 2020-21 Refugee and Humanitarian Program was the smallest in 45 years. The government has already reduced its Refugee and Humanitarian Program by 5,000 places, but also fell short of the reduced quota by another 7,803 and issued fewer than half of the available refugee and humanitarian visas.

This approach was reflected in Australian government response to refugee and humanitarian crisis in parts of the world, such as the recent crisis in Afghanistan where the Australian responses have been grossly inadequate, and Australia was lagging, especially when compared to other countries. The evolving situation in Ukraine provides the Australian Government with renewed opportunity to reconsider how it can help displaced people, in Ukraine, as well as other places of global tension.

What Council is Doing

Darebin City Council has a long-standing commitment to supporting and advocating on the rights of newly arrived, refugee and asylum seeker communities in our municipality.

This commitment includes advocating for the humane treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum as articulated in our *Towards Equality: Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-2029*, and through Council's active involvement and commitments to a number of local, state wide, national and even global initiatives and commitments. This includes:

- Executive member of Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum, including Back Your Neighbour campaign.
- Signatory of Refugee Welcome Zones declaration and member of Refugee Welcome Zone Leadership Group, reaffirming our commitment to welcome refugees and to support their needs, wellbeing and inclusion in Darebin.
- Member of Welcoming Cities network, including commitment to Welcoming Cities standard.
- Member and supporter of the Time For a Home campaign.
- One of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) 'All One Together' campaign ambassador organisation.
- Part of the UNHCR Global Compact On Refugees.
- Council advocacy efforts in 2020 had a significant impact on closing what was called Alternative Place of Detention at Mantra hotel in Preston.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal Government support to:

- Change its inhuman immigration and settlement policy, which continues to unfairly impact those who legitimately seek sanctuary and a safe home in Australia. Including reform Australia's humanitarian protection system to process with an independent, timely and fair merits review.
- Immediately release refugees being held in immigration detention into the community and commit to assisting their settlement with case work support and assistance.
- Urgently move to clear the backlog of refugee claims and appeals.
- Provide access to Centrelink, Medicare, employment support and other services.
- Implement a permanent humanitarian protection visa for people with refugee status.
- Increase the number of humanitarian visas under Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Program, including increasing the number and easing the process for family reunion.
- Implement a more compassionate and generous approach to refugee and humanitarian crisis around the world, to meet the expectations of international and national refugee organisations including United Nations, Red Cross, Amnesty International, Refugee Council of Australia and other NGOs and groups advocating for the right of refugee and people seeking asylum.
- More investment by both federal, and state government in programs and services that support the wellbeing and inclusion of people with refugees and asylum-seeking backgrounds, including employment, health support, housing, education, cultural recognition and celebration, addressing racism and discrimination and creating opportunities for meaningful civic participation.
- Partner with Council to help support dedicated and targeted refugee and asylum seeker support projects, programs and initiatives across Darebin, and Melbourne's broader northern region, including through the Darebin Intercultural Centre and a future Darebin Global Learning Centre.

Women and Gender Equity

The Context and Challenge

While all Australians may appear to be prescribed similar levels of rights and freedoms by law, structural and social gender inequalities remain embedded across society, with women* continuing to experience inequality and discrimination.

Women represent enormous diversity across age, culture, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic and immigration status, geographic location, sexuality, disability, and religion. Addressing gender inequity needs to be inclusive of all women and girls. Key challenges include:⁴¹

- Women retire on 46% of superannuation as compared to men, which means they have less to live on and as they live longer, this poverty differential is heightened. Women over 65+ are the largest growing cohort experiencing homelessness in Australia, and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women.
- Women continue to carry the disproportionate burden for unpaid domestic work. In Darebin, the percentage of women who completed 15+ hours of unpaid domestic work per week was 20.1% (approximately triple that of men, which is 6.8%). Women are disincentivised to return to work. Across the income scale, the interaction of personal tax, family payments and childcare support systems is deterring women with young children from participating more fully in the workforce.
- As of February 2022, the Gender Pay Gap in Victoria was 14.3%. The Gender Pay Gap is even higher for certain cohorts of women, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women with disabilities. These cohorts are over-represented in low paid and insecure work, facing barriers such as language, social exclusion, and financial insecurity.
- Women are more likely to self-harm than men. Women admissions comprise two thirds of Victorian hospital admissions for intentional self-harm related injury. In 2019, the rate of self-harm per 1,000 persons in Darebin was 1.24 for women (compared to 0.83 for men).
- Fear of men's violence and street harassment significantly limits the participation of women and gender diverse people in community life. This contributes to health outcome disparities, social exclusion and poor perceptions of safety for women. According to the 2015 Personal Safety Survey, the percentage of people who feel safe when walking alone at night in Darebin is 38.0% for women and 66.7% for men in Darebin.
- Violence against women, is one of the most extreme outcomes of gender inequality. Violence against women arises from a complex interaction between individual attitudes towards women, and social, institutional and cultural practices and values across our society. These attitudes and practices foster unequal and abusive power relations between men and women; gender stereotypes often exist in broader cultures of violence (*Please refer to Darebin's Family Violence Advocacy Priority for further information*).
- Access to sexual and reproductive health services is a fundamental right and access is essential for the health and wellbeing of women and girls. Currently, barriers and service gaps impact access to affordable healthcare, contraception and abortion services. Many hospitals do not provide the full suite of these health services and those that do cannot meet demand for the service. Services must be accessible, responsive and appropriate to people's needs, regardless of their location, age, sexuality, financial status and religious and cultural background.
- Research looking at the impact of COVID-19 shows that gender inequality has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This is due to several reasons, including women still taking on the largest share of care and unpaid household work. Women are disproportionately on the frontline of our fight against COVID-19, they also have faced great job losses and increased risk of violence.

* Throughout this document it should be noted that *women* will be used to refer to people who identify as women. This recognises that sex and gender are not the same and that some people's gender

identities may not reflect the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Moreover, this recognises that gender is not binary and that some people's gender identities may not fit into binary categories of male or female and indeed that some people may identify as neither male nor female, or both.

In line with the evidence base, Council recognises that addressing pervasive gendered power imbalances and supporting equity across all settings where people live, work, learn and play, is crucial to ending men's violence against women, including an end to family violence.

What Council is Doing

Council is implementing a range of initiatives to help support gender equality and outcomes for women including:

- Implementation of the *Gender Equity and Preventing Violence Against Women Action Plan 2019-2023*. The *Darebin City Council Plan 2021 – 2025* strategic action incorporated under Strategic Objective 1.7 is: *We will continue to be a local government leader in the prevention of violence against women, and gender equity.*
- Council is signatory to the Building Respectful Communities Partnership – Darebin recently reaffirmed its commitment to the partnership.
- Council funds a full-time Gender Equity Officer (*and was the first Victorian Council to do so*).
- Council supports various programs and initiatives that support Gender Equity including the Gender Equity in the Early Years initiative.
- Council is a prescribed entity under the Gender Equality Act (2020). Council must take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality and promote gender equality in its policies, programs and services.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges and welcomes several government initiatives in recent times that have responded to gender inequity issues including:

- Introduction of *Gender Equality Act (2020)* – Victorian State Government.
- State Government investment of \$6.5 million for new and existing sexual and reproductive health hubs; \$354 million for family violence prevention and response; \$70 million for public IVF services; and the \$6.9 million for community perinatal health teams.
- \$3.8 billion investment in Victoria's mental health system, and, the recognition and inclusion of women-only inpatient facilities - as well as mental health services specifically for women during pregnancy or with their newborn.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is seeking Federal and State partnerships to:

- Reform the child-care subsidy to remove disincentive for women to return to work and transition to near fully-funded child care for children under the age of five (*or reinstate COVID-19 childcare stimulus*).
- Commit that, in addition to the Big Housing Build, the State government will invest to increase the supply of local crisis accommodation options, support services, facilities and amenities in partnership with local service providers.
- Investments that create jobs equally for men, women and gender diverse people rather than investing in gender-segregated job creation that favour 'shovel-ready' construction and physical infrastructure projects, while neglecting social infrastructure.
- Investment in the MAV and the local government sector to support implementation of relevant aspects of the Safe and Strong Strategy, including the Gender Equality Act 2020.
- Partnering with Darebin to invest and support a range of local and regional initiatives that can respond to gender inequity, and create enhanced opportunities for women including through economic development, employment, mental health, family violence, peri-natal, recreational, health and wellbeing facilities and services that are tailored to foster better opportunities and outcomes for women.
- Investment in a sexual and reproductive health hub for the Northern Metropolitan Region.

COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Response and Recovery

The Context and Challenge

COVID-19 has compounded, exacerbated and highlighted historic and ongoing inequalities across the Darebin community. People experiencing disadvantage are more likely to be exposed to the disease and more likely to have worse health outcomes. This is evident across Darebin, which sadly experienced the highest death rate during the Omicron outbreak, at just over 34 deaths per 100,000 people, or 51 people in total⁴².

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the risk factors generally associated with poor mental health, including financial insecurity, unemployment, and social isolation. Simultaneously, protective factors, including social connection, employment and educational engagement, access to physical exercise, daily routine and access to health services reduced for many as a result of COVID-19. Consequently, demand for services increased substantially during the pandemic.

Local consultation identified that COVID-19 contributed to and exacerbated mental ill-health for the community, particularly for those already experiencing disadvantage and discrimination.

In November 2021, JobSeeker and Youth Allowance recipients in low SEIFA index suburbs Reservoir/East Preston were between 6.5-7%, compared to Greater Melbourne (4.9%)^{2 & 42}.

Between September quarter 2020 and March quarter 2021 when the national economy moved into economic recovery phase, the unemployment rate in Darebin increased from 6.4% (6,024 people) to 7.7% (7,274 people)^{2 & 42}.

Over the last 10 years, the quarterly unemployment rate for the City of Darebin tended to fluctuate more than Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia, indicating that Darebin tends to be more vulnerable and sensitive to economic shocks, compared to the broader population.

Community resilience provides opportunities before, during and after disaster recovery and other major shocks to identify and address inequalities. This is important for inclusive recovery strategies that support the community, with a focus on the cohort which are the most marginalised. Community resilience is impacted by a range of intersecting factors and therefore can be addressed through key physical, social and emotional dimensions that inform health and wellbeing outcomes.

What Council is Doing

Council implemented a range of measures in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic to help support our community, including through:

- A \$10 million COVID-19 Community and Local Business Resilience and Recovery Package in 2020.
- Including economic and social recovery from Covid-19 as a priority in the 2021-25 Council Plan.
- Boosting the provision of emergency food relief locally with an additional \$130,000 provided in 2020-21.
- A commitment to addressing disadvantage through our services, programs and the distribution of resources as outlined in the *2019-2029 Towards Equality Framework*. Council seeks to play a role in responding to disadvantage and seeking to address the underlying and multifaceted causes of disadvantage.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges the significant economic, health, wellbeing and social support packages that have been provided by the Federal Government and State Government since 2020, including through JobKeeper, JobSeeker, Business Support Fund, Working for Victoria and much more.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council calls on the Federal and State Governments to:

- Partner with Darebin City Council to provide ongoing and tailored support that responds to the evolving impacts of the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing recovery and rebuilding efforts, through priority local projects, programs and initiatives that seek to support new socio-economic, health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Work with Darebin and local communities throughout the north of Melbourne, to strengthen their preparedness, response and recovery plans and capability to current and future shocks, including COVID, climate emergency and disaster events.
- Increase and sustain investment in accessible community and clinical mental health services, including via full implementation of the Victorian Government's Royal Commission into the Mental Health System February 2021.

JobSeeker, Minimum Wage and Socio-Economic Disadvantage

The Context and Challenge

As the closest level of government of the community, local governments continue to directly witness and respond first hand to the significant impact that poverty and disadvantage have on a community's wellbeing. Poverty and disadvantage continue to have significant social and economic impacts, not only on the individuals directly affected, but upon a community's broader prosperity in terms of economic, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Evidence suggests the provision of an appropriate social security payment for individuals seeking work, and an appropriate minimum wage for workers and households, can make a significant contribution in addressing socio-economic disadvantage, inequality and poverty. Increasing these payments can reduce inequality, and help ensure people, often the most vulnerable, can be lifted out of poverty to participate as equal members of our and economy⁴³.

Australia's unemployment payment continues to remain one of the lowest in the OECD and hasn't risen in line with national living standards for a quarter of a century. While the Federal Government increased the payment during the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2021, the payment to jobseekers still does not cover the cost of basic, essential items and leaves many recipients living in poverty⁴³.

Many recipients face food insecurity, inability to pay for utility bills, poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, and the increased prospect of homelessness. The cost of these issues is in-turn felt by the community and all levels of government, as it then places increased strain and demand on more services to support people experiencing poverty. Along with the unemployment benefit being insufficient, many people who are in full-time employment also struggle to cover the basic cost of living and necessities due to the current level of Australia's minimum wage.

The decision to introduce JobKeeper and increase JobSeeker during 2020 meant that for the first many of our most disadvantaged were provided with an enhanced safety net during prolonged lockdowns, with many for the first time not living and experiencing life below the poverty line. Research from the Australian National University's Centre for Social Research and Methods found that during 2020, the poverty gap lowered by 39 per cent, and the number of people in poverty lowered by around 32 per cent⁴³.

An appropriate ongoing social security payment and minimum wage will not only continue to enhance the safety net across the country and living standards but is can also play a leading role in continuing to stimulate local economic activity throughout communities, whilst addressing socio-economic disadvantage.

What Council is Doing

As outlined in the *2019-2029 Towards Equality Framework*, Darebin Council is deeply committed to addressing disadvantage through our services, programs and the distribution of resources, Council seeks to play a role in responding to disadvantage, but as well and seeking to address the underlying and multifaceted causes of disadvantage.

As outlined in the *2021-15 Council Plan*, there are a range of initiatives underway that seek to address poverty and disadvantage, such as:

- The Council funded assertive outreach program to support people experiencing homelessness.
- Ongoing investment in place-based community development in low socioeconomic communities and neighbourhoods.
- Ongoing and sector leading investment in community services which are support disadvantaged communities, such as the Darebin Neighbourhood Houses network.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The Federal Government's increased JobSeeker Payments played a significant role in helping support local socio-economic outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic, with 4,329 residents receiving the payment in March 2020, but with the number of dramatically increasing by 5,487 additional recipients to 9,816 by October 2020².

Overall Darebin had approximately 8.5% of the local 15-64-year-old population in receipt of JobSeeker and Youth Allowance in November 2020, compared to just over 8% for Greater Melbourne. Some parts of Darebin including Preston East, Reservoir West and Reservoir East saw over 10% of the population in receipt of JobSeeker or Youth Allowance².

There is a clear correlation across Darebin, both pre-and-post pandemic, of higher rates of unemployment in lower socio-economic areas, and in relative terms, the higher local socio-economic areas have had larger increases in JobSeeker recipients². This warrants ongoing, increased and targeted local support.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council calls on the Federal Government to:

- Permanently increase JobSeeker Payments to at least \$69 a day.
- Support increases to the minimum wage in line with the cost of living.
- Ensure that increases to JobSeeker and the minimum wage do not come at the expense of other vital supports provided to people experiencing disadvantage and hardship.
- Partner with Local Governments to facilitate these measures, and to identify and invest in targeted measures that address and respond to socio-economic disadvantage and inequality across Australian communities.
- Partner with Darebin to invest in, and support, place based and tailored approaches to addressing historic socio-economic challenges, including through an expanded Reservoir Revitalisation Board, and new Preston Revitalisation Board and other recommended local priorities.

Mental Health Infrastructure, Services and Resources

The Context and Challenge

Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health disorders.

On average, 1 in 3 Australian women and 1 in 5 men will experience an anxiety disorder at some stage in their life. The Victorian Population Health Survey includes a measure of the lifetime prevalence of anxiety or depression⁴⁴.

In Darebin in 2017, 38.8% of women and 18.9% of men reported being diagnosed with anxiety or depression (compared with 36.9% of women and 22.6% of Victorians). While suburb level data is not available, data from across Australia indicates that the most disadvantaged areas tend to have the highest proportion of adults with high or very high psychological distress and mental health disorders⁴⁴.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the risk factors generally associated with poor mental health, including financial insecurity, unemployment, social isolation and fear. Simultaneously, protective factors, including social connection, employment and educational engagement, access to physical exercise, daily routine and access to health services reduced for many as a result of COVID-19. Consequently, demand for services increased substantially during the pandemic.

Local consultation identified that COVID-19 contributed to and exacerbated mental ill-health for the community, particularly for those already experiencing disadvantage and discrimination⁴⁴.

The Darebin community has expressed increasing concerns around the growing urgency arising from inadequate and currently insufficient mental health services, the need to increase investment in early intervention, and tertiary mental health services in the Northern metropolitan region.

The *Darebin Council Plan 2021 -2025* reflects this and includes several strategic actions and objectives that seek to improve mental health, primarily by increasing social connection.

This is in recognition that local government is generally not part of the mental health service system, but it can influence wellbeing through addressing social isolation and fostering community cohesion.

The Federal and State Government's plans for new mental health infrastructure and services that support access to health services, must consider the current shortage of mental health care services across Darebin and address this growing need.

With over 75% of mental health problems occurring before the age of 25, Headspace provides a recognised and trusted service that can play a crucial role in local mental health support for people aged 12-25 years⁴⁴. However, there is no Headspace centre situated within Darebin and local young people continue to be required to travel outside of the municipality to access a headspace service.

There are neighbourhoods within the Darebin community, across the north eastern parts of Reservoir and Preston, where residents experience significant socioeconomic disadvantage and poverty. Darebin is home to several organisations who provide emergency relief support to individuals and families experiencing disadvantage. However, for many of the clients accessing these services, mental health is a significant and often underlying issues to a range of poor health outcomes.

Due to the fear and stigma of mainstream services, or due to lack of accessible local services, emergency relief providers tend to be the first point of contact, and for some clients one of few services that they are regularly connected to.

It is essential that these vital services are supported and resourced to adequately to respond to and connect people to mental health services, including through the State Government's plans to fund the rollout of new Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs, as recommended through the Royal Commission into Mental Health.

What Council is Doing

Council continues to implement a range of initiatives to help respond to and support mental health and wellbeing outcomes, including through:

- Council Plan: actions captured by Council Plan Strategic Objective 1.4 *We will increase social connection to reduce isolation and loneliness and support positive mental health.*
- Council's Families, Youth & Children Department and Equity & Wellbeing department co-funded Mental Health First Aid in 4 schools in Darebin.
- Addressing place-based disadvantage and supporting community connection in the areas of East Preston and East Reservoir.
- Funding a Public Drinking Outreach Program in Darebin in 2022, which responds to the health and wellbeing needs (including mental health needs) of people engaging in problematic public drinking.
- Addressing the impacts of gambling harm through implementation of the Electronic Gaming Machine Policy.
- Recognising impacts of discrimination, including ageism, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia etc- and addressing this through Towards Equality: Darebin's Human Rights Framework.
- Council funded a social worker to work across key emergency relief agencies in 2021/22, in recognition of the increased case complexity of clients (often when mental ill-health was prevalent).
- Council continues to fund a homelessness assertive outreach program – homelessness can be both a cause and consequence of mental health disorders.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges the various Federal and State initiatives to date that have sought to respond to regional and local mental health challenges:

- Federal Government announcement of \$2.3 billion boost to mental health services in 2021.
- The Victorian Government announcement of \$3.8 billion for a decade-long reform of the mental health system, in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.
- The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.
- Implementation of Mental Health Reforms across Federal and State government policy areas and portfolios.

Furthermore, the Victorian Government's Inquiry into Mental Health, also specifically identified and recommended that new Infant, Child and Family Health and Wellbeing Hubs should be rolled out across Victoria, to fulfil the role of Local Mental Health and Wellbeing Services for families with children between 0 to 11 years of age.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on the Federal and State Governments to:

- Work with Darebin City Council and local health service providers to establish a new Headspace service in Darebin's suburb of Reservoir, to help support mental health outcomes amongst young people
- Work with Darebin City Council and local health service providers, to establish a new Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub within Darebin.
- Partner with Council and local health service providers to establish enhanced peri-natal services, including through a new Infant, Child and Family Health and Wellbeing Hub, to fulfil the role of Local Mental Health and Wellbeing Services for families with children aged 0 to 11-years.
- Implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.
- Increasing accessibility, availability and quality of services for residents who continue to experience disadvantage compared to other regions (including in non-growth areas) – to ensure suburb level socio-economic data is considered in the planning and provision of mental health care services.
- Support key demographics including young people, people with a disability, older communities, CALD communities, and LGBTIQ+ communities.
- Ensure gambling reform to reduce the harm associated with electronic machine gambling.
- Ensure emergency relief organisations, neighbourhood houses and libraries are provided with the support, resources, training and referral pathways to assist their clients with mental illness to enter and remain connected to the mental health care system.

Young Families and Peri-Natal Hub, Services and Support

The Context and Challenge

With a growing number of young families and children anticipated to call Darebin home now and in future years, significant opportunity exists for the Federal and State Governments to partner with Darebin Council, to help provide greater support for young families and children, including through peri-natal and dedicated mental health services.

The number of children (0-6) residing in Darebin is forecast to grow by 4,575, from 14,813 in 2020, to 19,388 by 2041, placing increased demand on services for young families, parents and children⁹.

Across Darebin, Council's maternal health services continue to experience rising demand in response to this growth. In 2020-21, there were approximately 1,869 births across Darebin, 888 first time mothers supported, an 3,560 additional maternal health consultations facilitated, and 725 mothers referred to specialised mother and other family support because of either emotional, physical, social isolation or domestic violence issues. Across Darebin the prevalence of mental health disorders within children and adolescents between the ages of 4 years and 11 years has been recorded at 10.3%⁴⁵.

Significant research suggests that early development conclude that from conception to at least the child's second year that this period of life is critical in shaping health and wellbeing over the life course⁴⁵.

In this regard, providing a safe, stable, and nurturing environment, including with wrap around services for both children and parents, is critical to children's wellbeing and longer-term development. Providing support to parents, and the other important adults in children's lives, can strengthen a family's capacity to provide these environments for children.

However, parents and carers experiencing socio-economic disadvantage including stress and isolation, often do not access support until behaviours and problems become entrenched and, the environments in which children are cared for do not provide adequate support to ensure their wellbeing and developmental needs are met.

Furthermore, according to the North West Health Network, mental illness broadly across the northern region is continuing to grow rapidly. Data suggests that 24.4% of women and 16.8% of men in Darebin as of 2018, were reported to have recorded and experienced anxiety and depression⁴⁵. Ensuring all parents are provided with the care and support they need, forms a critical part of helping provide for a positive environmental and upbringing for all children.

As identified and recommended through the Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Mental Health, significant service gaps, and opportunities, exist for the Federal and State Government to invest in, and provide more dedicated and tailored support that responds to the needs of the growing number of young children and young families across the state.

As recommended through the Royal Commission, Federal and State Government should work together to invest in, and introduce new Infant, Child and Family Health and Wellbeing Hubs, to fulfil the role of Local Mental Health and Wellbeing Services specifically for 0–11-year-olds⁴⁵.

Darebin is well placed to be identified as a priority location for the rollout of a new Local Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, as well as a new Infant, Child and Family Hub, given our increasing number of local young families and children, as well as our strategic location in the heart of Melbourne's growing north.

What Council is Doing

Council provides a Maternal and Child Health service which includes the Enhanced Maternal and Child health service. The service supports families and their children from birth to six years of age in the areas of parenting, health promotion, developmental assessment, emotional health and wellbeing, social connection early detection and referral.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Mental Health provides the framework to consider investment and partnership opportunities across Darebin, to enhance maternal health, perinatal and mental health support for parents and children.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal and State Government support to:

- Partner with Council and local health service providers to establish enhanced peri-natal services including through a new Infant, Child and Family Health and Wellbeing Hub in Darebin for families with children aged 0 to 11.
- Partner with Darebin Council and local health service providers to establish a new Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub within Darebin.
- Invest to support Darebin's maternal health services and outreach programs to support more young families and children now and into the future and consider opportunities for other young family support services to be based in Darebin to respond to local needs.

Social, Affordable Housing and Homelessness

The Context and Challenge

Social and Affordable Housing

Victoria has an affordable housing crisis, made more severe by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a significant shortfall in social (public and community) housing and (private) affordable housing. The scale of this deficit requires a collaborative effort across all levels of government and all public and private sectors to deliver housing across the continuum of need.

As housing prices increase, more households are unable to afford suitable rental housing or enter home ownership. In large parts of the M9 region housing is unaffordable to the lower 70% of the household income range. This results in greater pressure on the rental market and increased housing stress, which increases the demand for social and affordable housing. All social and most affordable housing requires subsidisation⁴⁷.

Successive State and Federal Governments have not adequately invested in new growth nor maintenance of social housing, creating a significant supply shortfall in contrast to demand.

The planning system currently only has a voluntary affordable housing system in place for developers providing housing on private land, with affordable housing negotiations a complex and oftentimes unsuccessful outcome for councils and developers alike. The private market has a crucial role to play in providing affordable housing. And where there is an uplift in value provided to developers through a change to planning controls or approval of a planning permit, this uplift must be shared with the community by securing mandatory affordable housing contributions.

Darebin's high number of renters, 36.3% of which make up local households, compared to 27.5% across Victoria², are also a leading consideration in terms of ensuring housing stock across Darebin remains affordable, accessible and fit for purpose.

Homelessness

The 2016 ABS census noted 972 people in Darebin experiencing homelessness. However due to the nature of homelessness, this figure is estimated to be closer to 1,500 on any given night. Local councils across Victoria are increasingly responding to local homelessness issues, in part due to the unmet demand across inner and outer Melbourne for emergency accommodation and short and long-term affordable housing. Currently this work is taking place in an ad-hoc approach without a state or national approach to homelessness and housing affordability^{1 and 47}.

In 2020, Council funded and established an assertive outreach program for people experiencing rough sleeping. This program provided by Merri Outreach Support Service (MOSS) provides short-term case management and resources that support those who are seeking an exit from homelessness.

Data collated as part of the Assertive Outreach program indicates 340 rough sleepers have accessed case management and brief intervention support since the program commenced in January 2020. Other data collected by the program also indicates a total of 16 rough sleepers have been housed since the commencement of the program into social housing or private rental, and a further 77 into temporary accommodation

The level of need of rough sleepers in Darebin identified as part of the Assertive Outreach program and outcomes achieved clearly highlight an ongoing need for investment in supports to assist people who have experienced homelessness (particularly those who have experienced long-term homelessness) to move away from homelessness and into social and affordable housing. This investment will provide significant opportunity for people exiting homelessness to successfully transition into and maintain social and affordable housing.

Council acknowledges high risk accommodation settings (such as rooming houses and other residences where there is high density living, shared common areas and substandard living conditions) are often the only option for people sleeping rough, and are a product of insufficient social and affordable housing.

These settings have long posed a significant risk to the safety and wellbeing of residents, and this has been significantly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, prompting a response from the State Government to establish the High-Risk Accommodation Program (HRAR) in 2020. As the risk and the severity of the pandemic eases, a focus on these settings must continue to reduce the risk posed to residents and at times the broader community through these settings.

What Council is Doing

Social and affordable housing

Council is directly responding to the affordable housing crisis by developing its land for social housing. Council is leasing its land to a Registered Housing Association (52-60 Townhall Avenue, Preston) to develop affordable housing apartments.

Council is constantly advocating through the planning process for developers to voluntarily provide affordable housing in larger scale developments.

Homelessness

Darebin Council currently funds an Assertive Outreach program for people experiencing rough sleeping in the Municipality. This program provides short-term case management and resources that support those who are seeking an exit from homelessness. The current Darebin Council Plan for 2021 – 2025 also articulates a commitment to expand the Assertive Outreach Program over the period of the Plan.

Council works closely with Merri Outreach Support Service (MOSS) to support and work with those experiencing homelessness, as well as ensuring it is responding to emerging needs at a local level.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council welcomes the State Government's Big Social Housing Program, which has helped to support Darebin's 52-60 Townhall Avenue Preston social housing project through a Registered Housing Association.

Council also welcomes the commitment from the Victoria Government into several homelessness and affordable housing programs over the past five-years and Council is encouraged to see this level of funding allocated. We look to the State, and where relevant the Federal Government to expand on this through investment in prevention, early intervention and response.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on the Federal and State Governments to:

- Partner with Darebin to help deliver enhanced local projects, services and support that respond to social, affordable housing and homelessness challenges, including through investment to build and refurbish more social housing across Darebin and to enhance Council's Assertive Outreach Program.
- Introduce mandatory affordable housing controls to increase the availability and access to social and affordable housing stock.
- Establish a sustained and diverse funding stream strategy to enable long term planning and construction of social and affordable housing.
- Deliver at scale and supported social housing and resourcing for assertive outreach.
- Invest in targeted homelessness prevention programs and support services for groups at heightened risk of homelessness, notably young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with a disability and women over 55.
- Invest in specialist assertive outreach and case management services to assist people who have experienced homelessness (particularly those who have experienced long-term homelessness) to move away from homelessness and into social and affordable housing.
- Continue and expand the High-Risk Accommodation Program (HRAR) to ensure that experiencing homelessness are no longer subject to the risk of harm when residing in high risk accommodation.
- Advocate for it to be easier for co-ownership and intergenerational living arrangements to occur, including addressing planning and financial barriers.

Family Violence

The Context and Challenge

In Australia, approximately one in six women and one in seventeen men have experienced violence by a current or former partner since the age of 15.

Family violence is any abusive behaviour that is used to control someone in a family, family-like or intimate relationship, and makes that person afraid for their safety and wellbeing or the safety of another person. Family violence is an umbrella term which refers to different forms of abuse occurring in many types of relationships; it is most commonly used by men against their current or former partners.⁴⁸

In 2020/21, there 1399.1 police reported family violence incidents per 100,000 population in Darebin, which is an increase of 4% from 2019/20:

- 6 in 20 family violence incidents occurred between a current or former partner
- 91.6% of incidences were recorded as taking place at a residential location.⁴⁸

Family violence is a vastly underreported crime, and many people who experience family violence never seek support from services or report this to police. These statistics only show us part of the picture of how common this violence is.

All forms of violence are unacceptable. However, there are gendered patterns in the motivation, perpetration and experience of violence. The majority (95%) of all victims of violence, of all genders, experience violence from a male perpetrator. Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence against women in Australia.⁴⁸

While local government is not a direct family violence service provider, Council's work can help support and guide the broader family violence response system. With the high numbers of family violence incidences occurring in the community, Council recognises that many of the community cohorts it works with, including staff, are likely to have experienced or be experiencing family violence. Local government therefore plays a role in supporting referrals to appropriate and specialist family violence services.

The Victorian Government has committed to implementing all 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and to delivering on the vision described in *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children*. A key recommendation of both was to establish a network of Support and Safety Hubs, now known as The Orange Door, across Victoria.

The Orange Door NEMA (based in Heidelberg) is currently the key intake service for Darebin, which is part of the broader North Eastern Melbourne Area (Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik, Whittlesea and Yarra). The Orange Door incorporates the intake services for specialist family violence services (for victim survivors and perpetrators), Child FIRST services, and includes workers from Aboriginal services. The service conducts intake and risk Assessments, Safety Planning, Child Wellbeing Assessment for women, children and male perpetrators of family violence.

The delivery of The Orange Door network is a key part of the ongoing reform of family violence and the children and families service systems. These reforms strengthen responses for victim survivors of family violence and create better outcomes for children and families, while also addressing perpetrator behaviour, and improving access to interventions that support behaviour change.

Along with the work of other local service providers, significant opportunity exists for the State Government to consider investing in a dedicated Orange Door Service.

Responding to family violence also requires consideration and tailored responses to various community cohorts, not only through a new Orange Door Service, but as identified through the Royal Commission into Family Violence through social housing, affordable housing and homelessness services, with women aged over 65+ being amongst the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness.

What Council is Doing

Complementing Federal and State Government led efforts, Council undertakes a range of initiatives to help support and respond to family violence challenges across Darebin including:

- Council's *Gender Equity and Preventing Violence Against Women Plan 2019 – 2023*, while primary prevention focused, includes some actions with a family violence response focus.
- Darebin Family Violence Network (DFVN) – which provides an opportunity for information sharing, advocacy, peer support for practitioners working in Darebin. The Northern Integrated Family Violence Services (NIFVS) also provide high-level strategic oversight to the DFVN convenor as required.
- Council's family services team engage with several families where family violence has occurred, through direct case work, counselling and enhanced maternal child health.
- Some parts of Council's Family Services (i.e. Maternal Child Health) must comply with Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM), which sets out the responsibilities of different workforces in identifying, assessing, sharing information and managing family violence risk across the family violence and broader service system.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges and commends the various Federal and State Government initiatives to broadly address family violence, including through:

- The Federal Government's record investment of \$189 million over five years into prevention and early intervention efforts to end family, domestic and sexual violence.
- The Victorian Government Commitment to implement all 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and accompanying 2021/22 budget commitment of \$354 million to support victim survivors and address family violence.
- State Government's investment into the Orange Door Program, including an Orange Door in Darebin's neighbouring suburb of Heidelberg, which currently services the Darebin area.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

Darebin Council is calling on Federal and State Government support to:

- Partner with Darebin City Council and local service providers to invest in a new Orange Door Service located within Darebin.
- Ensure funding for specialist family violence and abuse services and crisis response services to provide immediate and ongoing support for people experiencing family violence and abuse, with a focus on specialist and culturally relevant services that support marginalised communities.
- Commit increasing the supply of local social, affordable and crisis accommodation options, support services, facilities and amenities in partnership with local service providers, that support all community cohorts experiencing family violence issues.

Reducing the Harm of Gambling and Alcohol

The Context and Challenge

Alcohol consumption and gambling both have strong negative impacts on residents in Darebin and continue to compound historic socio-economic issues.

Over recent years the annual average losses through electronic gaming machines (EGMs) located in Darebin have averaged \$82.6 million. The results also indicate that 'low risk' and 'moderate risk' gamblers do experience harm, and account for 85% of gambling harm in Victoria. Most of the losses in Darebin are experienced by the most disadvantaged communities that live in the north of the city that have the greatest number and density of EGMs⁴⁹.

Reducing harm associated with anti-social consumption of alcohol also remains an ongoing local concern. According to a VicHealth Indicators survey, almost one-third (31.4%) of Darebin residents were identified as being at risk of short-term harm from alcohol in a given month, above the Victorian average (29.4%). Almost one-third (31.2%) of residents living in Darebin agreed that getting drunk every now and then is okay, compared to the Victorians average (27.9%)⁴⁹.

Alcohol is also involved family violence rate for the male population (definite incidences per 10,000) is 10.3%, which is in the top 3 highest rates for all 14 LGAs in the North & West catchments.

The Victorian Auditor General's Office research has also found correlation between alcohol misuse, gambling harm and socio-economic disadvantage⁴⁹.

What Council is Doing

As identified though the Council Plan 2021-25, Council is working to reduce the harm of alcohol through a public health approach that seeks to address the environments and systems impacting these issues locally, not just focusing on individual behaviour and choices.

Council responds to planning applications for liquor applications with a Social Impact Assessment, and a recommendation as to whether the liquor application should be approved by Council. The factors that are considered include:

- Amenity, safety and alcohol restricted zones.
- SEIFA index and localised disadvantage.
- Community benefit - employment and economic benefits are considered.
- Proximity and location considerations. Proximity of packaged liquor outlets to Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) venues. Alcohol use can increase the severity and frequency of gambling amongst individuals experiencing gambling harm. Research indicates that there is a positive correlation between alcohol use and the severity and frequency of gambling.

Council works with authorities and service providers to reduce harm from consumption of alcohol in public spaces. This work includes the establishment of a pilot drug and alcohol program in 2022 to conduct outreach and make referrals to health support services as needed. This work has been funded by the Reservoir Revitalisation Board.

Harm associated with gambling is identified as one of the priority determinants of health in the Council Plan 2021-25. In addition, the Electronic Gaming Machine Policy and Action Plan 2018-2022 outlines Council's actions to reduce harm of gambling. The overall aim of the policy is to make the City of Darebin free of the harm associated with EGMs.

As part of this Policy, Council is actively supporting clubs, community groups and organisations to be independent of any EMG related income or sponsorship.

Council also works on reducing gambling harm regionally through the Alliance for Gambling Reform on campaigns and advocacy.

Federal-State Government Assistance

COVID-19 lockdowns, and temporary closures of EGM venues provided real benefit to the Darebin community. Temporarily instating shorter hours of operation in November 2020 also reduced gambling losses and harm. Victorians saved \$1 billion in the first few months of COVID restrictions.

Council welcomes the decriminalisation of public drunkenness, and the establishment of services and programs that prioritise health-based responses. We welcome the roll out of public health responses and look forward to sharing the learnings from our own pilot.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on State Government support to:

Reduce harm from alcohol

- Prioritise health and wellbeing impacts under planning applications, strengthening the ability of Council to refuse applications for new packaged liquor outlets that do not benefit the community.
- Allow for the designation of cumulative impact zones that enable Council to control new alcohol outlets in areas where the cumulative stress caused by existing overprovision of alcohol outlets threatens the licensing objectives.
- Invest in local health services that are equipped to support people who are intoxicated.

Reduce harm from gambling

- Decrease and restrict opening hours for EGM operations in Victoria, to 14 hours a day maximum, with all poker machines being off between midnight and 10am.
- Commit to extending any new harm minimisation measures recommended and implemented via the *Royal Commission into the Casino Operator Licence* at Crown Casino, throughout all suburban EGM venues throughout Darebin and Greater Melbourne.
- Giving the community a stronger voice in planning and licencing applications for EGM venues.
- Partner with Darebin Council around targeted local initiatives, services and programs that can respond to, address and prevent harm associated with alcohol and gambling across the municipality

Aged and Elderly

The Context and Challenge

With more than one-sixth of Darebin's population aged over 60, over 14.2% of Darebin's population also aged over 65, and the number of residents aged between 70 and 84 years making up 8.2% of our local population (compared to 7.7% across Greater Melbourne) ⁶, Darebin's growing older and diverse communities continues to require a range of facilities, services, and support to help meet evolving local cultural demands and needs.

Through *Darebin's Active and Healthy Ageing Strategy*, and *Ageing Friendly Strategy*⁵¹, Council continues to work to engage and support our aged and elderly communities through a range of services, resources and assistance.

However, as the needs of our aged community continue to grow and diversify, and as we continue to assist our aged community respond and recover from the prolonged impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Council welcomes Federal and State partnerships around local initiatives and programs.

What Council is Doing

Council provides a range of services to assist older people and those with a disability and their carers who wish to live independently and remain active in the community. Services and activities include general home care, personal care, respite care, home maintenance, housing support, support to navigate the My Aged Care system, dementia care, meals and community transport.

Through Council's extensive Age Friendly Darebin Review and Report, which produced 98 recommendations raised by older people across our community, Council has committed to continue prioritising the creation of an aged friendly Darebin, expanding direct care services, and registering to become a home care package provider.

Federal and State Government Support

Council acknowledges all the various support that continues to be provided across the Federal and State levels to support our aged and older communities.

But as one of the most multicultural communities in Victoria, and significant community cohorts across elderly Italian, Greek, and other culturally diverse cohorts, tailored local support continues to be welcomed.

The Federal Government's ongoing response to the reforms recommended in the Aged Care Royal Commission, also continue to remain an ongoing local priority and concern.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling Federal and State Government support to:

- Partner with Council to implement the recommendations and initiatives contained in Darebin's Age Friendly Report.
- Partner with Council around delivering enhanced Home and Community Care Services.
- Provide ongoing timely, accessible and meaningful services and support for older residents to live healthy and prosperous lives.

People with a Disability

The Context and Challenge

In 2016, 8,774 people, or 6% of the population of Darebin reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to a disability, with national data suggests that more than one in six Australians have a disability⁵².

Currently in Darebin people with a disability are disproportionately represented in low income and unemployed cohorts, with the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and Carer Payment designed in recognition of the fact that people with disabilities and carers have higher everyday costs and face significant barriers to entering the workforce. However, a recent Senate Inquiry into the purpose, intent and adequacy of the DSP, received significant evidence which suggested the DSP remains inadequate, and that people relying solely on this payment are too often living in poverty⁵².

Along with social welfare support adequacy, people with disability also experience challenges associated with community infrastructure, amenities and accessibility. In this regard for example, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) requires that all tram stops must be fully compliant with the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002* (DSAPT) by 31 December 2022 and all trams must be DSAPT compliant by 31 December 2032.

During recent consultation with community for the development of the *Darebin Access and Inclusion Plan 2021 -2026* (DAIP), community members highlighted lack of accessible transport as one of the key access issues faced by our community.

The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) recently undertook an examination of the State Governments progress on complying with tram accessibility requirements, and their strategies, plans and programs to achieve compliance with the legislated disability standards.

VAGO concluded that the State Government has not met legislated targets for accessible tram infrastructure and cannot comply by 31 December 2022. Based on the trend to date, DoT is also at risk of not meeting the 31 December 2032 tram compliance requirements⁵². In Darebin this is keenly felt through the lack of accessible tram stops, particularly along the 86-tram route.

What Council is Doing

Darebin has a long history of leadership in supporting the rights of people with a disability in the community. One of Darebin City Council's big ten actions in the *Council Plan 2021 – 2025* is to *build a more inclusive community for all*.

Darebin City Council has demonstrated its commitment to improving access and inclusion for people with disability through a 2016 resolution establishing and resourcing of the Access and Inclusion team. This team plays a critical advisory, engagement and advocacy role in the organisation and municipality. The team oversees the *Darebin Access and Inclusion Plan 2021 – 2026* (DAIP), supports the *Darebin Disability Advisory Committee* (DDAC) and *Equity Impact Assessment* (EIA).

During its lifetime the DAIP, Council continues to improve access and inclusion and provide equitable and dignified access to all parts of community life in keeping with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA), and Section 38(1) of the *Disability Act 2006* (Vic) which seeks to:

- *Reduce barriers to persons with a disability accessing goods, services and facilities.*
- *Reduce barriers to persons with a disability obtaining and maintaining employment.*
- *Promote inclusion and participation in the community of persons with a disability.*
- *Achieve tangible changes in attitudes and practices which discriminate against persons with a disability.*

Through community engagement, the following priorities were identified in the DAIP to achieve the above objectives:

1. Accessible and Inclusive Communication
2. Getting Around Darebin: Transport, Footpaths and Parking
3. Places we Live Work and Play
4. Accessible and Inclusion Activities and Events
5. Pathways to Employment for People with Disabilities
6. Changing Attitudes and Raising Awareness about Disability.

One of the actions within priority 2 is for Council to advocate for accessible transport for people with disability.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges previous and ongoing support that is provided at a Federal and State level to assist people with a disability across Darebin including the existing DSP payment.

What Council is asking for:

- The State Government to act and fulfil its targets for accessible trams and tram stops across the tram network including, including namely along route 86 tram route through Darebin.
- The Federal Government to reduce eligibility requirements and increase the current rate of the DSP and Carer Payment, to an appropriate rate that will guarantee people with disability and carers are able to have the economic security they deserve.
- Federal and State Government to engage and partner with Darebin Council and local service providers to support more local projects, programs and initiatives that assist people with a disability across the municipality and broader northern region.

Multicultural and Diverse Communities

The Context and Challenge

Darebin has a rich cultural, religious and linguistic heritage, stemming from the traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the contributions of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the various communities that have made Darebin their home.

Darebin is a diverse community of people, and we value and celebrate the things that make us different as well as the things that bring us together. Today, Darebin is home to people of diverse races, ethnicities, faiths and beliefs, abilities, gender, talents and aspirations, sexualities and sex and gender identities, age and occupations, income and lifestyles.

Over 33% of residents in Darebin were born overseas, and 36.9% of our community speak a language other than English at home - with increased in Mandarin, Nepalese, Vietnamese and Arabic reflecting the evolving migration and settlement patterns in our City, with our longer standing Italian, Greek, Macedonian and other communities, continuing to make invaluable contributions to our social fabric and wellbeing.

Darebin is home to people who speak over 138 languages. Approximately 7% of our population has difficulty speaking English. Prior to the pandemic, there were just over 2,000 international students live in Darebin.

In Darebin, our diversity is our greatest asset. Many people have come from all over the world and made Darebin their home, as well as a place to work, study and socialise. The Darebin community is a wonderful example of a successful, diverse community.

Council recognises the key role that it can play to harness cultural heritage and diversity, promote intercultural. In addition to celebrating and different cultures, central to this work are our efforts to address racism and discrimination to enable all residents to live their lives well, and to truly build a strong and cohesive community.

What Council is Doing

Council supports a range of initiatives to support our multicultural and diverse community including:

- As outlined in the *2021-25 Council Plan* and *Towards Equality Framework*, Council is committed to reducing discrimination and racism so that we can build a strong, healthy, cohesive and harmonious community.
- Support, promote and use Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) Community Reporting Tool (CRT), with focus on emerging incidents of racism as well as incidents of discrimination during COVID_19 pandemic and over the recovery phase.
- Activities of the Darebin Interfaith Advisory Committee and Welcoming Cities Reference Group.
- Memorandum of Understanding between Darebin Council and the Omar bin Al Khattab (Preston) Mosque Darebin Council and the Omar bin Khattab (Preston) Mosque have committed to working together to build and foster positive community relationships between the Mosque, Council and the broader community in a spirit of respectful co-existence and where all people feel valued, respected and included.
- The Darebin Intercultural Centre is a dedicated space for intercultural development, dialogue, engagement, participation and celebration. The Centre hosts events each month, from cultural programs and celebrations, to workshops, film days, forums, and panel discussions.
- Ongoing support and engagement with a variety of our local multicultural and diverse community groups through programs, events and various initiatives.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges the various Federal and State funding initiatives that have been provided over time to assist our local culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The State Government's multicultural policy statement sets out the Victorian Government's vision to enable every Victorian to participate fully in society, remain connected to their culture and ensure we all have equal rights, protections and opportunities.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin Council calls on Federal and State Government support to:

- Invest in the delivery of Darebin's new Intercultural Centre, in High Street Preston.
- Partner with Council to invest in and support our local culturally and linguistically diverse communities through upgraded facilities as well as programs, events and targeted initiatives that can help us build a fairer and more equitable Darebin.
- Advocate to the Victorian State Government for the introduction of a Cultural Diversity Equity Act, modelled on the *Gender Equality Act 2020* that will require the Victorian public sector, local councils and universities to take positive action towards achieving workplace cultural diversity, and equity, promote equity in their policies, programs and services and establish a Public Sector Cultural Diversity and Equity Commission to provide education, support implementation and enforce compliance.

LGBTQI+ Communities

The Context and Challenge

The City of Darebin has one of the highest populations of people of diverse sexualities, gender identities and intersex status in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

While previous iterations of the ABS Household Census has failed to fully count LGBTQI+ people, the 2017 Census (and the 2021 Census data to come) includes data on same sex households where partners are living at the same home address, as well as some unreliable (and therefore unpublished) data on gender identity⁵³.

According to the 2016 Census, 2.71% or one in every 35 people in Darebin stated that they were living as a couple with a same sex partner. Of all Victorian LGAs, Darebin had the fifth highest population of same sex (most likely, gay or lesbian) couples who live together in the same household. This compares with around 4% of people - or one person in every 25 - in Yarra, Port Phillip and Melbourne, who reported in the 2016 Census that they were living as a couple with a same sex-partner⁵³.

Anecdotally and through Council's work with LGBTQI+ focussed organisations in Darebin and in northern metro Melbourne, key sub-groups within Darebin's LGBTQI+ population are:

- Older lesbian women – many of whom have lived in Darebin since the 19760s and 1970s;
- Same -sex parented families, and in particular lesbian parented families;
- Young adults aged 17-35 years.

There continues to be significant, consistent data produced which shows that LGBTQI+ people and communities experience poorer health and wellbeing across a range of indicators, as a direct result of discrimination, exclusion and stigma. LGBTQI+ people can have poorer mental health and experience higher rates of homelessness, smoking and alcohol use and higher rates of family violence.

What Council is Doing

Council continues to support a range of initiatives to support our LGBTQI+ community including:

- Taking a clear stand to support LGBTQI residents, notably through official resolutions expressing support for the Safe Schools Coalition (Council resolution of 4 July 2016) and advocating for marriage equality (Council resolution of 6 July 2015 and 17 July 2017).
- As part of its formal endorsement of the Yes campaign in 2017, Council ran a highly visible campaign and support package in parallel with the roll-out of the same sex marriage plebiscite.
- Council has formally affirmed the Darlington Statement which establishes the human rights standards required by intersex people for their full inclusion, respect and autonomy (Council resolution of 6 November 2019).
- The Sexuality, Sex and Gender Diversity Advisory Committee continues to guide Council's work in this area. Membership reflects both the diversity within the LGBTQI+ community, as well as the demographic diversity of the broader Darebin community including ethnicity and faith.
- The current Council Plan 2021-2025 commits Council to the following actions:
 - Action 1-13 Develop a new SSGD Action Plan and implementation plan
 - Action 1-18 Undertake Rainbow Tick accreditation for Council's services and programs

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges the various Federal and State initiatives over recent times which have supported local LGBTIQI Communities including:

- The Federal Government legislated marriage equality in December 2017, however overall it has not provided significant policy, law reform or funding support.
- The establishment at a State level of the office of the Minister for Equality and the new Gender and Sexuality (now LGBTIQIA+) Commissioner in 2014/2015 was the start of a significant new focus and investment continuing through to the very recently launched 10 year LGBTIQIA+ Strategy 'Pride in Our Future', amongst various other State initiatives.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin is calling on Federal and State Government support towards:

- The Federal Government to include and fully account for LGBTIQIA+ people and their families in the 2026 Household Census.
- The Federal Government to seek opportunities to further legislative protections for LGBTIQIA+ people – such as a new Human Rights Act which would extend and embed protections of several critical human rights for LGBTIQIA+ people in settings such as employment, accommodation and health services.
- Calls on the State Government to strengthening an intersectional approach in its planning, working with key stakeholders and peak bodies in the multicultural, disability, aged, Aboriginal and related sectors to ensure an intersectional approach is supported in all work in, with and for LGBTIQIA+ people and communities.
- Calls on the State Federal Government to make further investments in mental health and wellbeing initiatives noting the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on LGBTIQIA+ people and communities.

Community Safety

The Context and Challenge

Council recognises that community safety, crime and perceptions of safety influence community wellbeing outcomes, and are largely influenced by the same social determinants that impact on health. Council also recognises the important role local government can play in creating safe communities, through our influence on both the physical and social environments.

Urban design is important for crime prevention because, poorly designed and managed places can create opportunities for crime and make people feel unsafe. When people feel unsafe, they may be excluded from engaging in their community. This might mean poor access to social connection, transport, work and education, exercise can all be impacted by fear of crime or low perceptions of safety.

Perceptions of safety are subjective and strongly influenced by a person's gender, age and lived experiences such as homelessness, employment, drug dependency. Perceptions of safety data is gathered by Council through the annual community survey and through other site-specific surveys. During the day, 94.8% of residents feel safe in public areas in Darebin. This score reduces significantly to 73.6% at night. This is lower again for East Preston and East Reservoir, areas with low SEIFA index scores⁵⁴.

Research commissioned by the Community Crime Prevention Unit (CCPU) found that frequent and intense worry about crime was not widespread in Victoria, and that the most effective way to reduce worry about crime in a broader community is through pro-social activities that encourage community cohesion and connectedness

Poor design and management of places are not the only risk factor for crime. Crime is the result of a complex interplay of social and environmental factors that cannot simply be 'designed out'.

Darebin Council recognises the significant overrepresentation of many already disadvantaged groups in our justice system, such as Aboriginal people, people from low-socioeconomic background and people with a mental illness. Incarceration is especially damaging to children, families, and Aboriginal people. Current laws do not reflect that incarceration is a last resort, and has been dramatically increasing, particularly among Aboriginal women in Victoria.

A holistic approach that invests in strategies which seeks to prevent involvement in crime is required to truly create a safe and inclusive community.

What Council is Doing

The Council Plan seeks to improve community safety with a focus on public spaces and community cohesion. Some programs include:

- Assessing and addressing concerns in public spaces through Community Safety audits and gathering data on gendered experiences of safety.
- Creating safer spaces through capital works, funded by Council and through external grants, in particular, the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) Building Safer Communities program. Building and designing spaces that use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Principles (CPTED) that seek to deter crime and make people feel safe.
- Working with the Community Safety Reference Group and Northland Precinct Action Group to collectively address safety issues.
- Youth Services support young people at risk of entering the justice system through outreach, programs, social support and connection with mental health and legal services.
- Community Development in East Preston and east Reservoir promote community cohesion, including through the Reservoir Revitalisation Board.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges the various Federal, but namely State, initiatives that have been provided over time to help support community safety outcomes across Darebin:

- State government has supported Council through funding of capital projects. The Victorian Crime Prevention Strategy outlines welcome social based preventive programs.
- Decriminalisation of public drunkenness and the establishment of services and programs that prioritise health-based responses are very welcome.
- Decriminalisation of sex work to promote safety for sex workers and improve health and human rights outcomes.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal and State Government support to:

- Partner with Council and local community services and organisations to help create a safer and more resilient community, through local initiatives, programs and projects.
- Partner with Council around local community safety initiatives, including urban design and amenity projects, as well as local graffiti prevention measures
- We call on the State Government to establish an appropriate enquiry into how graffiti and dumped rubbish are managed on State Government land.
- We call on the State Government to significantly increase funding for graffiti removal and removal of dumped rubbish on land owned by the State Government.
- Continue to increase investment in community safety infrastructure projects through the DJCS Building Safer Communities program.
- Increase investment in social crime prevention programs and services that seek to prevent people from being involved in crime.
- Increase and sustain investment in accessible community and clinical mental health services including full implementation of the Victorian Government's Royal Commission into the Mental Health System February 2021.
- Raise the age of criminal responsibility. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately impacted by these laws and pushed into prison cells at even higher rates, accounting for 65 per cent of these younger children in prisons.
- Reform bail conditions to revise criteria which inappropriately restrict the granting of bail to Aboriginal people.

Theme 3 – Sustainable transport and connectivity

While Darebin remains highly appreciative of the State Government's significant recent investments to enhance local transport infrastructure, namely via the Preston and Reservoir Level Crossing Removal Projects, the reality is that far more investment is required to enhance access to more sustainable transport modes, including trams, buses, active transport, and accessible transport options, particularly across Darebin's northern suburbs.

With Federal and State Government support, Council's advocacy priorities ensure that enhanced transport options across Darebin can play a positive role in better connecting residents, visitors, and employers to local shops, services and jobs, which can play catalyst roles in fostering a more prosperous, liveable and sustainable Darebin.

Whether it be through Council's advocacy priorities to extend Tram Service 11 all the way to Edwardes Lake in Reservoir, enhance access to Tram Route 86, leverage better outcomes around our level crossing removal projects, or to secure better bus, active transport and accessible transport outcomes, including around enhanced electric motor vehicle infrastructure; Darebin's connectivity advocacy priorities can help Darebin to become a genuinely 20-minute accessible and sustainable city, by reducing local transport carbon emissions, congestion, improve transport safety, respond to socio-economic disadvantage, and foster a more prosperous and sustainable regional and local commuter experience and economy.

What we are advocating for:

- Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure
- Active Transport, Cycling and Pedestrians
- Road Safety Infrastructure, Traffic Calming Measures, Driver Behaviour and Law Enforcement

Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure

The Context and Challenge

How we get around affects so many aspects of our lives and community. Transport connects people to each other, as well as to economic opportunities, educational opportunities, and to cultural opportunities.

A safe and sustainable transport system that offers real choices for people is the lifeblood of the Darebin community.

Melbourne's population is growing. Fast. That's putting more and more pressure on the services that people use every day, like trams, trains and buses. There haven't been enough improvements in these services to keep pace with population growth.

Darebin's population is predicted to grow by around 40% in the next 20 years. Driving and parking on our streets is only going to get harder unless we find ways to increase the number of trips taken on public transport, bikes and walking. If Governments at all levels act, we can keep our streets safe for older people and children, reduce congestion and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars by transitioning to electric vehicles.

However, following the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on commuter and transport activity, we have a generational opportunity to help re-imagine local community transport infrastructure and networks to help build a more sustainable and vibrant community.

This approach can play a lead role as we collectively work to respond to the climate emergency.

The rapid uptake of electric vehicles, combined with improved public transport, bus, active transport and pedestrian networks, can all help us create a more sustainable local transport network that efficiently connects people to jobs, education, and services.

Responding to transport needs in an existing urban location like Darebin, has huge opportunity to build a more sustainable local transport network, and to alleviate pressure on regional transport networks across Melbourne's broader north.

Through support for Darebin's various sustainable transport and infrastructure priorities, we can also work to respond to ongoing local socio-economic issues by providing enhanced transport options.

What Council is Doing

Council is planning for our transport future by refreshing our *Transport Strategy* to account for population, density and electrification challenges, as well as developing an electric vehicle policy to ensure the Darebin community is positioned to grasp the evolving technologies associated with the transport sector.

Alongside Council's various initiatives, Council is also continuing to work through various forums and channels, including the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, Metropolitan Transport Forums, and other regional bodies, to continually advance Darebin's transport advocacy priorities.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges and greatly appreciates the recent major investments and commitments from the State Government around enhancing local transport infrastructure, namely via the completion of the Reservoir Level Crossing Project, including a new Reservoir Station, as well as the State's investments to remove more levels crossings in Preston including- Oakover Road, Bell Street, Cramer Street and Murray Road in Preston. The State Government has also since committed to and

commenced planning for the removal of the Keon Park level crossing project, which Council welcomes ongoing engagement with.

What Council is asking for:

We need an investment across Darebin towards more sustainable transport modes and infrastructure, to support sustainability, environmental, health, wellbeing and local socio-economic outcomes.

Tram Service Improvements

- Route 11: extend the number 11 tram route to Edwardes Street, Reservoir. This should commence through a Federal and State funded business case or feasibility study to consider options to extend the line, and should be accompanied with an interim electric bus route to service the proposed route and assess its viability.
- Route 86: upgrade the 14 tram stops on tram route 86 to accessible tram stops.
- Oakhill Tram Stop: reinstate the tram stop to support local businesses, residents and schools.

Bus Service Improvements

- Chandler Bus Highway: a new bus route and express bus lane to connect La Trobe University to Burnley Station via the Chandler Highway.
- Improvements to Bus Services: improve routes and increase the frequency of train, tram and bus services.

Suburban Rail Loop

- The State Government should prioritise the construction of the northern section first of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) first, and use this city-shaping project to leverage complimentary opportunities like bus network reform, public spaces and bicycle network improvements across a future Reservoir Priority Precinct.
- As an interim measure, the State Government should immediately introduce an electric orbital bus route along the proposed SRL corridor, connecting Reservoir to Sunshine, Melbourne Airport, Fawkner, La Trobe University and National Employment and Innovation Cluster (NEIC), which would immediately enhance public transport options for residents across the northern parts of Darebin to connect with other employment and services hubs.

Electric Vehicles, Energy and Emissions

- Electric buses: accelerate the rollout of electric buses to improve amenity and health and reduce carbon.
- Zero Carbon technologies: Power the train network with renewable electricity.
- Actively plan and support the transition to private and public electric vehicles across Darebin through grant funding and local infrastructure across the municipality.

Accessible Transport

- Continue to invest to upgrade all of Darebin's public transport infrastructure, including train stations, tram stops, bus stops and other associated facilities, including roads and footpaths, to be accessible for all residents across the community.

Level Crossing Removal Projects

- The State Government should partner, and more closely engage and consult with Council and our local community around the design and delivery of local Level Crossing Removal Projects.
- Council continues to advocate for several key changes, particularly to the design of the commuter car park at Bell Station (to be relocated to the west entirely, or access provided from the west via Bell Street at a minimum), and better sport and recreation facilities and outcomes for Preston City Oval
- Council also calls for close consultation around the design of the Keon Park Level Crossing and calls on the State Government to ensure accompanying investment is provided to beautify and enhance urban amenity and connectivity outcomes along this entire upgraded stretch of rail corridor.
- Feasibility study for Westgarth Street level crossing removal that includes both Westgarth Station and Dennis Station, to also provide active transport link.

Active Transport, Cycling and Pedestrians

The Context and Challenge

Whilst Darebin has higher rates of residents who utilise public transport and active transport to get to and from work (*over 25% compared to 12.6% average across Victoria*), prior to COVID-19 over 49% of residents utilised their car as their primary mode of transport to work.⁶

Whilst Darebin has some of the highest rates of public transport as well as cycling rates across Victoria, significantly more opportunity exists to further enhance local active transport patronage by investing in new infrastructure and projects across the municipality.

What Council is Doing

Council has invested in making walking and cycling to school safer and more attractive. This takes cars off local streets and helps kids get more activity every day. Darebin's streets and parks saw a surge in bike riding and walking leading to increased demand for safe places to ride and walk during COVID. Council is responding to this by trialling pop-up bike routes on local streets in Northcote and Preston.

Council has also invested to enhance a range of cycling and walking paths and infrastructure over recent years, to encourage more active transport activity, including through a new shared user path connecting La Trobe University, Bundoora Park and the surrounding Darebin community.

Identified Strategic Cycling Corridors (SCC) in Darebin also include:

- St Georges Road and High Street SCC
- Broadhurst Ave/Edwardes Street/Broadway/Dunne Street SCC
- Gower Street/Cramer Street SCC
- Dundas Street/Oakover Road SCC
- Christmas Street/Dennis Street/Gladstone Street SCC

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges and welcomes the State Government's investments to enhance local active transport, cycling and walking infrastructure, including with accompanying works associated with the level crossing removal projects.

The State Government's temporary bike lane along Heidelberg Road from 2021 also showed what can be achieved for a relatively small investment. Children and older people are riding from Fairfield toward the city in safety

What Council is asking for:

Darebin Council is calling on Federal and State Government investment and support to:

Cycling

- Cycling facilities and safety: dramatically improve opportunities for cycling and walking.
- Partner with Council to invest in, and enhance all priority cycling corridors across the municipality.
- Preston to CBD Safe Cycling Corridor: comprehensive and inclusive community engagement to improve safety and accessibility along St Georges Road for cyclists, pedestrians, public transport users, motorists, local residents and traders (*indicative cost \$4 million*).
- Construct a new Alphington Rail Spur shared use path, and provide open space, a direct pedestrian and cycling connection between Fairfield Activity Centre, Fairfield Railway Station and the Alphington Paper mill precinct, and provide an economic boost to Fairfield Village.
- Permanent bike lanes for Heidelberg Road (indicative cost estimates depending on solution range from \$500,000 to \$2 million).
- Bike Parking at Railway Stations: dramatically increase the number of bicycle parking hoops installed at railway stations in Darebin.

Pedestrian

- Dramatically improve opportunities for walking by increasing funding for pedestrian crossings identified by Council in Darebin.
- Fairfield Safety Improvements - fund and install safety improvements in Fairfield, including a new pedestrian crossing on Station Street at Wingrove Street.
- Partner with Council to invest in and enhance accessible paths and infrastructure throughout Darebin, including through:
 - Safety improvements at the Boldrewood Parade and Broadway intersection in Reservoir (*estimated cost \$5 million with full signalisation*).
 - Elizabeth Street pedestrian operated signals at Rayment Street (*estimated cost \$400,000*).
 - Elizabeth Street, Bell Street, and Nicholson Street intersection – improvements to pedestrian and bike riding safety. The intersection has narrow footpaths and is not conducive to a safe walking or cycling environment (*indicative costs between \$ million and \$5 million*).

Road Safety Infrastructure, Traffic Calming Measures, Driver Behaviour and Law Enforcement

The Context and Challenge

Darebin - like many other Councils - is experiencing an increase in hooning and unsafe driver behaviour.

Enforcement is a critical response to antisocial behaviour on our roads, and not enough Victoria Police resources are available to tackle this growing and concerning challenge.

Positive change requires genuine partnerships and collaboration between different levels of government, local communities and external organisations.

This collaborative approach has thus far resulted in a 15% reduction of all crashes in Darebin between 2014-2018, and a 59% reduction since 2007.

However significant more work is required to address road safety and driver behaviour issues, which Council welcomes ongoing support on through a range of proposed local measures and projects.

What Council is Doing

Council has invested in creating safer streets that enable the community to choose to walk, cycle and access public transport more over the past 10 years, which has resulted in a 15% reduction of all crashes in Darebin between 2014-2018, and a 59% reduction since 2007.

We have undertaken a school safety audit and have implemented improvements for schools that were identified as high risk.

We developed the award-winning Streets for People program that increases sustainable transport by creating safer streets for walking and cycling by transforming several key areas for active transport.

We are transforming the way we plan and manage transport by adopting a three-year rolling place making project – Your Street, Your Say. This project combines a highly inclusive community engagement program with transport analysis to identify a forward program of transport treatments that improve safety and accessibility, while enhancing place.

And we are updating our Transport Strategy to also account for freight, parking and electrification challenges.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council welcomes Federal and State Government investment and support to date across Darebin to help improve road safety issues.

Along with receiving on average \$594,000 funding through the Federal Government's Black Spot program, and through respective State Government programs, significantly more is required to enhance local road safety for all Darebin commuters and residents.

Darebin particularly welcomes the State Government's establishment of a new 'Hooning' Community Reference Group (CRG), which will serve as an advisory body to the State Government to:

- Provide feedback and support the development of recommendations that enhance deterrence of hooning behaviour.
- Support the development of community-led action plans to address hoon driving across Victoria.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin is calling on Federal and State Government support to:

- Fund and resource local traffic enforcement and road safety measures including through targeted campaigns and educational initiatives.
- Invest in road safety projects across Darebin through funding critical infrastructure upgrades for:
 - St Georges Road corridor, Boldrewood Parade roundabout and Broadway.
 - Miller Street/High Street/Plenty Street/Dundas Street traffic signal phasing changes in response to fatality and ongoing safety concerns (indicative costs \$150,000).
 - Modifications to Miller Street and Gilbert Road tram roundabout to improve safety (indicative cost \$1 million).
- Lower default speed limits around schools and in residential streets including through the introduction of traffic calming and other measures.
- State Government support to implement actions and outcomes from Your Street Your Say program, specifically in relation to improved freight operations (\$500,000).

Theme 4 – Community wellbeing and infrastructure

While Darebin has welcomed State Government investment into several local community facilities and services in recent years, Council has been proud in continuing to play a leading role in fostering local investment efforts to enhance local community wellbeing infrastructure.

Whether it be through the \$60 million redevelopment of the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre (NARC), \$34 million construction of the new Narrandjeri Indoor Sport Stadium as the catalyst to improving community access across John Cain Memorial Park, or through commencement of the relocation of the Darebin Intercultural Centre to Preston Town Hall, Council has been proudly working to help drive the renewal of local community infrastructure that can help support socio-economic, health and wellbeing outcomes for all residents.

However with Federal and State Government support, Council's community wellbeing infrastructure priorities can help to create local economic stimulus as part of evolving COVID-19 recovery efforts, whilst supporting local businesses, jobs, and ongoing health and wellbeing outcomes through the construction of new facilities and administration of new services that directly respond to local community needs across all parts of Darebin.

Whether it be through Council's advocacy priorities around the opportunity for the Federal and State Governments to invest and partner with Council to develop a Business Case and Feasibility Study around the possible future redevelopment of the Reservoir Leisure Centre as a Health and Wellbeing Hub, enhancing community access and facilities for women and girls sporting activity across John Cain Memorial Park, or more funding to improve early childhood and kindergarten facilities to meet growing demand- Darebin's community wellbeing and infrastructure advocacy agenda can help us in fostering a more prosperous and liveable Darebin.

What we are advocating for:

- Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre
- Reservoir Leisure Centre
- La Trobe University – Home of Football (Matilda's) and Home of Rugby Union
- John Cain Memorial Park
- Women and Girls Sport and Recreation Facilities
- Preston Library and Darebin Global Learning Hub
- Library, Neighbourhood Houses and Community Hubs
- Early Childhood and Kindergarten Facilities and Infrastructure

Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre

The Context and Challenge

Built in 1968, the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre (NARC) is a 50-year-old Council asset, built as an outdoor pool facility. It is a very important and much-loved service for the local community. The centre has received a number of upgrades throughout its life; however, the current facilities were considered at the end of their lifespan, and required replacement.

In the past three years prior to COVID-19, there have been almost 200,000 attendances in children's swimming lessons, over 63,000 attendances in school swimming lessons programs, and a further 32,000 have attended swimming carnivals hosted at the facility; while the Northcote Swimming Club has enjoyed a growth in squad numbers from 190 in 2017 to almost 500 in 2020.

This vital piece of community infrastructure serviced more than 5,000 members and swim school children annually and saw close to 500,000 yearly visits. Despite the ageing of the facility, NARC continued to attract many visitors from Northcote, its surrounding suburbs and broader neighbouring municipalities for their aquatic education, health and fitness, swim carnivals and summer cool down.

However now that the current facility reached the end of its serviceable life, and with our population growing above the state average; our community needed this facility to be upgraded to service our community's needs now, and into the future.

That is why Council determined to invest \$63.5 million towards a major redevelopment of the NARC, with construction having commenced from 2021, with a redeveloped facility that will best meet the needs and aspirations of the community, users and stakeholders.

Modelling anticipates that a redeveloped NARC will greatly increase capacity to service as many as almost 900,000 visitations from the first year of operations, based on financial modelling, the predicted population growth, and the age profile of residents within the primary catchment area of the facility.

What Council is Doing

Darebin Council is investing \$63.5 million towards a major redevelopment of the NARC, to ensure the community will have access to a range of ongoing and modern aquatic, leisure and active recreation facilities and services, that will support community needs over the next 50 years.

Based on Council's feasibility, economic modelling, concept and design plans, the new NARC will be developed to include and support:

- 25-meter indoor lap pool and 50-meter outdoor pool
- Indoor leisure adventure area
- Outdoor nature based and splash play area
- Learn to swim pool and warm water pool (including spa)
- Steam room and sauna
- Male, female, and gender neutral changerooms
- Accessible changerooms
- Multipurpose room
- New administration, reception and café areas
- Allied health and consulting rooms
- Wellness program room
- Pilates program room
- Group fitness program room and gymnasium and cycle room
- Childcare

The Economic Impact Assessment undertaken around the redevelopment by Otium Planning Group in October 2020, estimated the projects would generate 236.6 FTE (full time equivalent) jobs for up to a 24-month construction period, including 162 construction jobs, 51 manufacturing jobs and 22 professional services jobs. Ongoing and indirect employment opportunities are expected to increase from 65 to 81 by year ten of NARC operations, with the facility scheduled to be opened from mid to late 2023²⁰.

The net economic benefits associated with the project have been forecast to create \$50.8 million net effect of construction, \$23.04 million net economic benefit of operations, and \$33.9 million in net health benefits²⁰.

The newly redeveloped centre also aims to be one of the first indoor and outdoor aquatic facilities in Australia to attain a Six Star Green Star rating. Through the ongoing collaboration with stakeholders, this environmental achievement will be sustained by the adoption of an industry leading approach towards new and emerging trends for health, safety, environment and waste management.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The Victorian State Government, through Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV), has to date provided a \$10 million Community Sports Infrastructure Loan towards the NARC Project, for which Darebin Council remains extremely appreciative of.

However in the context of the evolving impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and given the fact the NARC project is currently under construction and currently supporting local jobs and economic activity, further opportunity exists for new Federal and State funding contributions towards the projects, which will play a leading local role in ongoing COVID-19 health and wellbeing recovery efforts from mid-2023 when the NARC is due to open.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

With a total project cost of over \$60 million, Council is seeking Federal and State support for the NARC redevelopment which continues to sustain local jobs and stimulate local economic activity as we continue to emerge from COVID, through:

- Federal and State major direct funding contribution towards the overall construction, completion and opening of the NARC.
- Potential additional funding commitments towards some of key elements and project components of the NARC, including:
 - Shade surrounding the 50m outdoor pool
 - Splash Play areas
 - Childcare Facility.
- Federal and State Government partnership with Council to potentially fund and deliver local events, activities, services and initiatives from the NARC that respond to local community and broader regional health and wellbeing needs once the facility opens from mid-2023 onwards.

Reservoir Leisure Centre

The Context and Challenge

Through Council's 2021-2025 Council Plan, Strategic Actions 2.1 and 2.2, Council have committed to deliver equitable and accessible infrastructure to provide opportunities for our community to live well, including through considering redevelopment opportunities for the Reservoir Leisure Centre (RLC), to also incorporate opportunities to enhance health, wellbeing and socioeconomic outcomes for the broader community.

Along with the opportunity for Council to consider upgrading and refurbishing the Centre's aquatic facilities, a generational opportunity to also consider the role that a revitalised Reservoir Leisure Centre can play in responding to historic socio-economic and wellbeing challenges associated with the community.

The community of East Reservoir experiences a greater level of socioeconomic disadvantage relative to Darebin overall and Greater Melbourne more broadly. A health and wellbeing study of the local community undertaken in 2020 found that residents perform less favourably against nearly all the social determinants for health and have poorer physical and mental health outcomes².

- This area has one of the lowest SEIFA Index score of 950 (ranked 103rd SA2 in Victoria, 635th in Australia), falling within the 3rd deciles for both Victoria and Australia.
- 34.3% represent the lowest quintile of household income across the state.
- 19.4% of children are identified as developmentally vulnerable.
- 8.2% of the community is living with a severe or profound disability that requires daily assistance with mobility, self-care or communication.

Covid-19 has also concerningly exacerbated these existing challenges and complexities.

Council recognises the important role that community infrastructure and services play in supporting wellbeing outcomes and breaking the cycle of intergenerational socioeconomic disadvantage.

As a result, Council is currently exploring how the redevelopment of Reservoir Leisure Centre can address socio economic disadvantage and improve wellbeing outcomes.

Investigations taken place so far contemplate how Council's resources are best distributed to generate meaningful and impactful health and wellbeing outcomes for this diverse community.

What Council is Doing

In 2019, a Feasibility Study for the redevelopment of RLC was undertaken by Council.

Following on from this, Council passed a resolution seeking to understand how investment in the RLC could improve health and wellbeing outcomes and address socioeconomic disadvantage for the local community.

This resolution was pivotal in shifting the process from being a traditional aquatic leisure facility planning exercise, to one which was informed by the broader social determinants of health.

This resulted in the RLC Health and Wellbeing Study.

The Study engaged a multi-disciplinary team from across Council and the Department of Public Health at La Trobe University, to consider how investment in the centre could enhance the health, wellbeing and socio-economic outcomes for the community.

Council's analysis has continued to consider redevelopment opportunities, some of which include through:

- Hub and place-based approach with clusters of community infrastructure and complementary services.
- Physical and social infrastructure that offers support across the spectrum, from prevention, early intervention and tertiary response.
- Considers a life course approach and needs for people as they grow and age in place, with a focus on strengthening early years as a foundation for wellbeing.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Whilst State Government has been provided in recent times to support other community infrastructure projects, namely \$3 million investment towards the construction of the Narrandjeri Stadium at John Cain Memorial Park, and a \$10 million Loan towards the construction of the Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre (NARC), a once in a generation opportunity exists for both the Federal and State Governments to partner with Darebin City Council, including through the development of a business case, to explore broader opportunities around the revitalisation of RLC's aquatic, as well as health and wellbeing service and outreach potential.

Similar to how the State Government in particular have invested in similar models, including through its \$60 million towards a Gippsland Regional Aquatic Centre, and \$3 million towards Brimbank's St Albans Health and Wellbeing Hub, a once in a generation opportunity exists at RLC for Federal and State investment to create a genuine health and wellbeing hub that can respond to Reservoir, as well as potentially the broader north's needs.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal and State Government investment towards:

- Funding towards a joint Business Case to explore all the future opportunities, options and scenarios associated with the redevelopment of RLC, and how the Centre could accommodate health and wellbeing services to address broader socio-economic challenges.
- Between \$30 million up to \$60 million of Federal and State investment towards a major redevelopment of the RLC as a future Health and Wellbeing Hub.
- Support to allocate future Federal, State and Non-Government services and resources from a future Reservoir Health and Wellbeing Hub that respond to local community needs
- Leverage various forums and funding opportunities, including through the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, Northern Metropolitan Partnerships, to consider opportunities to partner through a business case, and provide funding towards capital upgrades.
- Partner with all relevant government, regional and community organisations, including from across Reservoir and Darebin, to consider how a redeveloped RLC could accommodate complementary services, to existing services providers, through reconstructed Centre with dedicated health and wellbeing resources.

La Trobe University – Home of Football (Matilda’s) and Home of Rugby Union

The Context and Challenge

In May 2020 Darebin Council resolved to strongly support the establishment of a new Home of Football (‘Home of the Matilda’s’) at the La Trobe University, Bundoora Campus, and to support La Trobe University’s formal bid to accommodate the facility.

In May 2021, Council welcomed the news that the Federal (\$15 million) and State Governments (\$101 million) would invest a combined total of \$116 million towards the construction of the Victorian Home of the Matildas from December 2021, to be completed and opened ahead of the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup. The announcement also included La Trobe becoming home to the new State Rugby Union Centre²².

Building off Darebin’s proud and longstanding record, participation and engagement in football, including Council having accommodated Football Victoria’s original State Football Centre at John Cain Memorial Reserve in Thornbury, and football (soccer) having continued to be one of Darebin’s most popular and highly participated local sports- Council recognised the role of having the new ‘Home of the Matilda’s’ based at La Trobe University in Darebin, would help in solidifying our municipality as the football hub of Melbourne’s north, and create new and ongoing facilities and pathways to inspire more women and girls from across Darebin and the region to participate in football and community sport.

However as outlined in *Darebin’s Sport Infrastructure Outdoor Strategy*²¹, approximately 64% of current sporting facilities across Darebin are already considered to be at participation capacity. With respect to football alone, local participation numbers are forecast to rise from 2,365 in 2019, to 3,501 by 2036, a further 1,136 additional participants, envisaged to be largely women and girls.

Darebin is forecast to require at least an additional 3 new rectangular pitches, and at least 1 synthetic rectangular pitch by 2036 to accommodate this growth.

Along with Darebin Council supporting a new Home of Football at La Trobe University to solidify the municipality as a football hub, Council’s support also made provision for exploring opportunities for the new ‘Home of Matilda’s’ to provide direct access and pathways for local women and girls football teams from across Darebin, and to also enhance women and girls community football facilities and access at the State Football Centre based at John Cain Memorial Park.

By providing greater access for Darebin sporting clubs to access facilities at the new Home of the Matilda’s, and at John Cain Memorial Reserve, we can help respond and alleviate current and future sport participation demands, particularly for women and girls.

Whilst Council welcomed the State Government unveiling of artists impressions for the site in March 2022, as early works continued, Council was particularly encouraged at the Victorian Government’s commitment around for local sporting clubs in the context of the Home of Matildas, where the Victorian Government stated that *“grassroots community sports clubs are also the winners, with extensive access to most facilities for training and development programs a key priority for the project”*²².

While Council understands that approximately 33% of proposed new field and pitch usage may be allocated towards Darebin Sport Clubs and community uses, Council continues to welcome the opportunity to progress and formalise arrangements around local community access and use.

What Council is Doing

Along with Darebin Council having resolved to strongly support the establishment of a new Home of Football ('Home of the Matilda's) at the La Trobe University, Bundoora Campus, and to support La Trobe University's formal bid to accommodate the facility- Council has continued to invest significantly to improve football and other community sport facilities over recent years.

As outlined in *Darebin's Sport Infrastructure Outdoor Strategy*²¹, Council has invested over \$15 million to upgrade local sport facilities including through 11 new pavilions, 13 major lighting renewals, and much more, including across numerous football sites to benefit community football clubs.

Council has also greatly assisted at an operational level with the State Government, SRV and La Trobe University through the planning and mitigation processes associated with accommodating the designs of a new Home of Matilda's and State Rugby Union Centre at La Trobe University.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Along with the combined \$116 million Federal Government (\$15 million) and State Government (\$101 million) invested towards making the Home of Football and State Rugby Union Centre a reality at La Trobe University in Darebin, the State Government in particular has provided a number of other investments across community sport and recreation upgrades across Darebin.

However as the single biggest State Government investment into sporting infrastructure within the Darebin municipality, the \$101 million State contribution towards the Home of Matildas at La Trobe University should seek to proactively accommodate and make provision for access, facilities and services to support women and girls participating in community football and sport from across Darebin and Melbourne's north.

A key element in this regard also includes providing better facilities and access for women and girls community football participation at the State Football Centre's pitches at John Cain Memorial Park.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on the Federal Government, State Government, Sport and Recreation Victoria, and La Trobe University to:

- Partner in good faith with Darebin City Council to ensure local community football and rugby clubs from across Darebin, are provided with access to the new facilities, pitches and services at the new Home of Matilda's and State Rugby Union Centre, particularly for local women and girls.
- Partner with Darebin Council to enhance facilities and accelerate access, for women and girl's community football participation at John Cain Memorial Park, particularly in the context of the State Football Centre's pitches.

John Cain Memorial Park

The Context and Challenge

John Cain Memorial Park (JCMP) along Darebin Road in Thornbury, has long played an integral role in helping to support local and regional sport, recreation, health and wellbeing outcomes.

As the home of several community sporting organisations over many years, including the longstanding Northcote City Football Club (NCFC), JCMP was identified for its strategic importance at a regional, state and international level, in the lead up to Melbourne hosting the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

In 2004, the Darebin International Sport Centre Complex (DISC) was conceived and subsequently agreed to be accommodated at JCMP until 2034 between the State Government, Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) and the then Darebin Council.

Consisting namely of Football Victoria's (FV) State Football Centre, the State Cycling Centre and Velodrome, and the State Bowls Centre, along with the ongoing presence of respective facilities, also hosted Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games events, training and activities, namely related to bowls and cycling.

However since its original inception, and following on from the 2006 Commonwealth Games, the DISC, as well as the broader John Cain Memorial Park has largely continued to remain under the stewardship of the State Government, SRV and respective State Sporting Bodies, with the local Darebin community continuing to wait for the original envisaged community sport 'legacy' benefits off the back of the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

Since the DISC was originally conceived, there have been significant shifts in the regional and local sporting landscapes which warrant renewed consideration around future investments and opportunities across JCMP.

This includes the State Cycling Centre remaining underutilised from a local community sport and cycling perspective, no state significant sporting events having been held at the State Lawn Bowls Centre since at least 2014, and that FV are now being provided with a new \$116 million world class 'Home of the Matilda's' at La Trobe University in Darebin, which along with new football facilities and pitches, will also accommodate their administrative staff and offices.

As the State Government and SRV embark on developing a new bid for Melbourne to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games, 20 years after DISC was originally developed to support Melbourne's 2006 Commonwealth Games, a once in a generation opportunity exists for JCMP to be reimaged in the context of better supporting and meeting the needs of Darebin's community sport pressures, particularly for women and girls.

What Council is Doing

Council is very proud to have invested the single biggest amount into beginning rejuvenation efforts across the John Cain Memorial Park site, to genuinely respond to local women and girls sporting needs, and to enhance participation and access, through over \$34 million towards the construction of a new indoor sport stadium, Narrandjeri Stadium and Outdoor Netball Courts.

Once opened from mid-2022, the Stadium will provide much needed facilities and spaces for a range of sports including netball, basketball, volleyball, badminton and netball, and will greatly enhance opportunities for women and girls to participate in sport and physical activity across Darebin.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The State Government and SRV have provided a much welcomed \$3 million contribution towards the construction of Narrandjeri Stadium and Outdoor Netball Courts, as well as \$100,000 towards JCMP Northern Pitch Floodlighting Upgrades, which Council fully recognises and appreciates.

Council's new Narrandjeri Stadium, along with the Federal (\$15 million) and State Governments (\$101 million) new \$116 million funded Home of Football and 'Home of the Matilda's' at La Trobe University, provide the catalysts to beginning to enhance facilities and community access for women and girls across the entire JCMP precinct, and to accelerate the return of the JCMP site to community use ahead of 2034.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin is calling on the State Government and SRV to:

- Partner with Council, local community sporting clubs who access JCMP, and the surrounding community, to consider future investments, plans and opportunities across the DISC and JCMP precinct, in the context of enhancing community access and facilities for women and girls sport and recreation activities.
- Consider funding opportunities through the State's Local Sport Infrastructure Fund, Female Friendly Facilities Fund, the State Sports Centres Trust, or other potential opportunities including through a possible the FIFA Women's World Cup Legacy Fund, to fund new community sport upgrades across JCMP, including for Northcote City Soccer Club.
- Accelerate plans to transition the DISC, and its associated State Sporting Tenants, away from JCMP ahead of, and earlier than, the 2034 original timeframe.
- Consider opportunities to recognise and create a 'Northern Community Women and Girls Sport Precinct' at JCMP for Darebin, and in the context of Melbourne's broader northern sporting region.

Women and Girls Sport and Recreation Facilities

The Context and Challenge

The ongoing planning and delivery of sporting infrastructure is crucial in helping promote and provide more opportunities and inclusive environments for women and girls across Darebin.

Historically, participation rates amongst women and girls has been significantly lower than that of men and boys, however through several different national and state wide initiatives, we are beginning to see these figures improve.

Since 2013, Council has invested in excess of \$15 million in outdoor sports field infrastructure to promote inclusivity and participation growth amongst underrepresented groups, particularly women and girls.

This has included 11 new and redeveloped pavilions, 13 sports field lighting projects and 15 cricket net and facility projects.

In this time, participation in women and girls sport has grown from 11.5% to 31% with over 2,800 registered participants in outdoor sport.

As the participation rate continues to rise, we need to ensure our facilities are safe and welcoming environments for all to participate.

What Council is Doing

Council has recently adopted the Outdoor Sports Infrastructure Framework 2020 which aims to help guide and inform future capital contributions for infrastructure redevelopment.

The scoring matrix in this framework prioritises infrastructure redevelopment for clubs who provide participation opportunities for women and girls and other marginalised and underrepresented groups.

Additionally, Council is currently in the process of delivering a new Leisure Strategy that has a specific lens towards equity and inclusion. This will be completed and put forward for adoption in 2022.

Council is also supporting and financially contributing to the Aboriginal Women and Girls Sport and Wellness Centre and is in the final year in a partnership agreement with the Darebin Falcons.

In 2022, Council will formally open Narrandjeri Stadium – a 4 court multi-sport indoor facility (accompanied by the recently developed 4 outdoor tennis/netball courts) at John Cain Memorial Park. The Stadium is the product of Council's commitment to drive Women and Girls sports participation and address the shortage of indoor courts in the south of the municipality and will act as the catalyst towards enhancing access for women and girls sport across the John Cain Memorial Park Precinct.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council acknowledges and appreciated the funding received to date, largely from State Government, to support local women and girls sporting facility projects across the municipality.

- WH Robinson Cricket Net Redevelopment (\$100,000) 2021/22
- Aboriginal Women and Girls Sport and Wellness Centre (\$5.3 million) 2021/22
- KP Hardiman Hockey Pitch and Sports Field Lighting Redevelopment (\$500,000) 2020/19
- Narrandjeri Stadium and Outdoor Netball Courts (\$3 million) 2020/21
- Lighting Package at Moore, Donath and Dole (\$2 million) 2020/21
- GH Mott Lighting Redevelopment (\$124,000) 2020/21
- Edwardes Lake Athletic Track (\$200,000) 2019/20
- Mayer Park Lighting Redevelopment (\$150,000) 2019/20
- Bill Lawry Pavilion Redevelopment (\$500,000) 2018/19
- JE Moore Pavilion Redevelopment (\$100,000) 2018/19
- Bundoora Park Pavilion Extension (\$100,000) 2019/19

What Council is asking for:

Darebin Council is seeking Federal and State Governments investment to:

- Partner with Darebin Council to deliver its pipeline of infrastructure projects that support women and girl's participation, consistent with *Council's Outdoor Sports Infrastructure Framework 2020* and Capital Works Pipeline, including through:
 - the redevelopment of the KP Hardiman Pavilion – indicative total project cost of \$3 million (including designs) scheduled for 2023.
 - Funding to enhance all of Darebin's sport and recreational facilities to support women and girls sport participation, including at John Cain Memorial Park, and other locations throughout Darebin.

Preston Library and Darebin Global Learning Hub

The Context and Challenge

Darebin Council Plan's Strategic Action 2.23 specifically commits Council to consider the development of a new Darebin Global Learning Hub in the Preston Civic Precinct, that incorporates library and community spaces, and looks at potential options to include social housing¹.

With Preston's population having grown by 2.06% in 2020 (ahead of the Greater Melbourne average of 1.58%), to now reach 38,460 residents, pressure on new and enhanced community infrastructure to meet local needs will continue to grow⁶.

Combined with Preston's various socio-economic challenges and diversity, including high and comparable unemployment rates in Preston East 8.1% and Preston West 6.5%², compared to the Greater Melbourne average in 2016 of 6.8%, Preston East having the highest number of low income households and JobSeeker recipients in 2020 in Darebin², and Preston's evolving community diversity and demographics, mean that a future Global Learning Hub in Preston could be needed to help Council continue responding to Preston's, as well as Darebin's broader needs.

A Darebin Global Learning Hub could integrate and expand local services in and around the Preston Civic Precinct, and consider future integration of the Preston Library, Maternal Child Health Service, and potentially establish a business incubator and community learning hub in the short term.

In the long term, expansion of the re-located Darebin Intercultural Centre at 350 High Street Preston, and associated support services that respond to service gaps for children, young people and families, could also be integrated.

As identified in *Darebin's Library and Learning Strategy 2020-2024*²³, with income inequality and growing social isolation continuing to remain as ongoing local challenges, Darebin's Libraries, including through a future Darebin Global Learning Hub, can help provide the welcoming, safe and accessible spaces for our community members to connect, discover and learn.

Strategically positioned within the Preston Civic Precinct, a new Darebin Global Learning Centre could also leverage the State Government's new Level Crossing Removal Projects in Preston, including the construction of a new Preston Train Station, and play a catalyst role in the revitalisation of the broader Preston Activity Precinct, alongside Council's aspiration to protect the Preston Market.

What Council is Doing

Along with committing through the Council Plan Action 2.23 to consider the development of a new Darebin Global Learning Hub in the Preston Civic Precinct, Council has allocated an initial \$180,000 during 2022 towards the development of a feasibility study to consider opportunities around a new Darebin Global Learning Hub in Preston to potentially be a place for:

- An expanded Preston Library and Services, including collections, reading and spaces for children, young people and families, and older community members, events and programming to support lifelong learning, technology and support to help bridge the digital divide.
- Spaces for community education and community-led programming.
- Community information.
- Community Working Spaces.
- Business Co-Lab Space.
- Maker Spaces (Music Sound Studio + Craft Workshops Spaces).
- Large Event Space + Technical Assets.
- Small to medium meeting spaces.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Whilst Darebin has welcomed previous investment and support for local learning, cultural and community facilities over recent years, particularly from the State Government, significant opportunities exist for both the Federal Government and State Government to partner with Darebin Council, and our community, around a feasibility study, and potential business case, to develop a new Darebin Global Learning Hub.

By partnering with Council from the outset of this process, Federal Government and State Government can help to guide and influence the design of a new Darebin Global Learning Hub that makes provision for a range of Federal, State and local services that can respond to local community and broader regional learning and wellbeing needs.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal Government and State Government support to:

- Partner with Council as part of a feasibility study, and a potential joint business case, to consider opportunities around the location, design, construction, and co-location of programs and services within a future Darebin Global Learning Centre.
- Major co-investment towards the future construction of a new Darebin Global Learning Hub within the Preston Activity Centre.
- Co-investment to support specialist, targeted and ongoing programs and services to assist our most vulnerable and underrepresented community cohorts, specifically targeting new and emerging micro-businesses, professionals and students.
- Considering opportunities for existing Federal and State Government programs, including regional Jobs and Skills Taskforce, Regional Job Advocates, as well as non-government strategic partnerships to be considered and integrated into a future Darebin Global Learning Hub.
- Considering the role of a new Darebin Global Learning Hub as a catalyst for broader opportunities to revitalise the Preston Civic Precinct and Activity Centre.

Library, Neighbourhood Houses and Community Hubs

The Context and Challenge

Darebin Libraries provides welcoming, inclusive and accessible spaces for our community members to connect, discover and learn. Our libraries provide equitable and easy access to information support, facilities, technology and programs that range from improving wellbeing and meeting life's challenges to tackling climate change and educating the community about the safe use of technology.

For every \$1 invested in Darebin Libraries, \$5.60 is returned in community benefits according to Libraries Work! The socio-economic value of public libraries to Victorians.

This is higher than the Victorian average of \$4.30. Community benefits include:

- Access to services, programs, information technology and safe public spaces.
- Opportunities for social interaction.
- Contribution to language and digital literacy.
- Complement to education services.
- Contribution to community health and wellbeing.
- Environmental savings through use of shared resources.

Darebin Libraries helps deliver Council's goals as outlined in the Council Plan 2017–21, the Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017–21, the Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019–29, the Age Friendly Darebin report, the Youth Services Strategy 2019–21 and Darebin Climate Emergency Plan 2017–22

Our local libraries in Fairfield, Northcote, Preston and Reservoir also act as key community and neighbourhood hubs. Between 2014 up until prior to COVID, our local libraries combined facilitated and supported:

- Provided nearly 6 million loans – with a huge 202% increase in digital collection loans, a 38% increase in usage of our online reference and skills training programs and a corresponding 16% decrease in physical collection loans.
- Supported more than 3.1 million visits to our library branches.
- The Darebin Libraries App has been downloaded to 10,340 devices – we've seen a 113% increase in usage since launching which enables our customers to access library resources 24/7 from outside the library walls.
- Our webpages have been viewed over 18 million times with pageviews increasing by 46%.
- Delivered close to 3,000 events for nearly 160,000 attendees – that's a 38% increase in the number of events and a 31% increase in attendee numbers.
- 417,811 computer sessions – a 5% increase which supports those who don't have access to their own computers.
- Supported 244,806 wireless sessions – this 44% increase demonstrates more people are bringing their own devices to our libraries.
- Our Home Library Service has delivered nearly 44,000 items to 310 customers (a 9% increase) and 12 aged care facilities.

However along with the increasingly important role our local libraries have been playing in response to COVID-19 recovery, our local population is continuing to grow and will create more demand for local library and learning facilities and services. Darebin is currently home to over 160,000 residents and this number is forecast to grow by 39 per cent to more than 230,000 by 2041, which will likely see increased density across Northcote, as well as particularly in Preston and Reservoir.

Darebin Libraries all play a critical role in supporting local resilience, socio-economic, learning, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Across Reservoir Library, Preston Library, Northcote Library and Fairfield Library, Darebin's team members continue to use our reach, trusted relationships and skills to support and encourage ongoing local COVID-19 recovery efforts through direct regular engagement with our community.

However, in order to meet ongoing growth and demand, with support, Darebin would welcome further resources to support these community needs both in libraries and out in the community – in terms of spaces, building infrastructure, technology infrastructure, team members, and partnerships. Some of the key opportunities and challenges in this regard include:

- Preston Library and a potential future Darebin Global Learning Hub project in Preston (please see dedicated advocacy document on this).
- Northcote Library's current gross floor area is 1260m² – using ABS population projections from 2016 Census, by 2026 will need at least 2,200m² and by 2036 2,400m² of additional space to accommodate local growth.
- Fairfield Library is currently 400m² and by 2036 the floorspace should be 800m² to accommodate and respond to local growth and demand.
- The space allocated to Reservoir Library within Reservoir Community and Learning Centre is 920m² – opened in 2015. By 2036, the Reservoir Library floorspace requirements are in the range of 2,600m² to meet local growth and demand.
- Darebin also has an identified a library service gap in the north-east of our municipality near Polaris. In 2016, that community would have needed a 500m² library to service their needs – by 2036, a library would need to be 850m² to serve that community's needs.

These figures were compiled using ABS Census population projections and library space was determined using People Places A Guide for Public Library Buildings in New South Wales (the established Australian benchmark for library services).

What Council is Doing

The *Darebin Libraries and Learning Strategy* ensures our resources are focused on delivering improved library services for our community, with an increased focus on communities at risk of exclusion through co-design approaches.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council appreciates previous State Government contributions towards enhancing local Library services, including through the Living Libraries Funding Program which supported the Reservoir Library and Community Learning Centre upgrades.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

Darebin is calling for Federal and State investment and partnership to:

- Invest in upgrading Darebin's Library and Community Hubs facilities, services and resources to support local socio-economic, learning and wellbeing outcomes, now and into the future.
- Partner with Council to develop a feasibility study and business case around a potential future Darebin Global Learning Hub, situated in Preston.

- Investment and support to help align and integrate Council's learning pathways, through local libraries and community facilities, with those of the broader education system, including with TAFE, higher education and university pathways

Early Childhood and Kindergarten Facilities and Infrastructure

The Context and Challenge

The early years are a crucial period in children's development, with impacts that can last a lifetime.

High quality, inclusive and accessible services for children and families from birth to the time they enter school play an essential role in providing children with a good start in life. High quality services require the provision of fit-for-purpose and accessible facilities.

As a result of significant population growth, and the roll-out of a second year of funded kindergarten, demand for early years services will grow significantly over the next twenty years across Darebin.

Investment is required in Early Years facilities to meet this growing demand and to ensure equitable access across Darebin.

In 2020 there were an estimated 14,813 children aged 0-6 living in Darebin. By 2041 there are expected to be 19,388 children of this age, an increase of 4,575.

Preston is expected to account for over half of the growth in Darebin's 0-6 year-old population in this period, whilst growth Reservoir will continue to be home to nearly a third of Darebin's 0-6 year-olds in 2041⁵⁶.

Population growth alone will create the need for:

- An additional 100 Maternal & Child Health sessions per week by 2041. Preston East and Preston West are priorities for additional room capacity.
- An additional 1,173 long day care places will be required by 2041 to maintain the current provision rate of 1 place to every 3.9 children aged 0-6. Additional demand is expected to be highest in Preston East, Preston West and Reservoir East. Currently both community-based provision and overall provision varies across local areas and Reservoir East is significantly under-served.

The roll out of a funded kindergarten for three-year-olds, combined with population growth, will create the need for a significant increase in kindergarten places.

Demand modelling developed jointly with the Department of Education and Training shows that demand for kindergarten places will increase by 257% from 2021 to 2029. To meet this demand an additional 952 kindergarten places, need to be created through infrastructure investments by 2029. Additional kindergarten capacity will be required in Northcote, Preston West, Reservoir East, Reservoir West, Thornbury and possibly Preston East (depending on future developments – current population estimates do not include the Preston Market development).

Equity is an essential consideration in planning for early years infrastructure.

In Darebin there is a correlation between developmental vulnerability for children as measure by the Australian Early Development census (AEDC) and the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) scores, which measure relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage.

The areas with the lowest SEIFA scores (Kingsbury, Preston, Reservoir) also have the most children identified as being developmentally vulnerable. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can have lower levels of participation in early childhood services due to barriers to access and engagement⁵⁶.

Other important considerations are quality and integration. High quality standards in early years services are fundamental to delivering the best possible long-term impacts on children's development, wellbeing and learning. High quality physical environments are critical to enabling high quality service provision, keeping children, families and staff safe, and providing the best possible experiences for children and families in all services.

The integration of early years services provides significant benefits to children, families and the whole community and is recognised to be particularly important for families who experience disadvantage or other barriers to accessing services.

Council's Early Years Infrastructure Plan aims to enable children and families to access a range of services at the same location, including universal and targeted services, and support collaborative and integrated service planning and programming. We aim to create flexible and active community spaces that bring the community together across generations.

What Council is Doing

Council has developed an *Early Years Infrastructure Plan* which seeks to provide a strategic framework to ensure that Council provides its community with a suite of early years facilities that provide safe and high- quality environments for children, families and staff, meet the increasing demands for service created by population growth and the roll-out of funded three-year-old kindergarten, and promote equity and inclusion.

The Plan lays out an approach for Council to play its role in meeting these growing needs through key actions to:

- Optimise the use of existing Council facilities.
- Expand the capacity of existing Council facilities where feasible, desirable and cost-effective.
- Building new facilities in areas of high need, with a focus on delivering integrated service hubs. Priority locations are Reservoir West, Preston West and Preston East.
- Investing in, and supporting, community managed services to ensure equitable and affordable access to community-based services for the whole community.
- Working with early years' service providers to optimise the level, accessibility and equity of service delivery utilising spare capacity where needed, adopting agile operational models, utilising innovative, flexible and best practice approaches including outreach and pop-up models that meet the needs of a changing and diverse community.

From 2021 to 2030 Council has allocated \$18.45m in its 10-year Capital Works Plan to meet the demand created by the roll-out of funded three-year-old kindergarten.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The Victorian Government's commitment to funding two years of kindergarten for Victorian children is an Australia first and one of the most significant reforms in the history of early childhood education in this state. The Government's commitment of \$1.68 billion of infrastructure funding state-wide over the next decade through the Building Blocks Infrastructure strategy to support these reforms is much needed.

Council has been working closely with the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) to plan for the roll-out of three-year-old kindergarten and secure state government investment for new facilities and expansion of facilities in Darebin. We are currently engaging around a new Building Blocks Partnership Agreement, which will outline in principal commitment from both the State Government and Council to a pipeline of projects that will create additional kindergarten places in areas of need.

In 2022 the State Government is developing a new three-room kindergarten at Reservoir East Primary School as part of the Kindertartens on School Sites (KOSS) program. The State is funding the three kindergarten rooms, whilst Council has co-invested to fund two flexible consulting rooms within the facility. The new facility will open in 2023 and will provide a much-needed boost to kindergarten capacity in the Reservoir East locality alongside high quality consulting spaces for a range of health and social services to be delivered to children and families in an integrated setting.

In 2022 Council also received a Building Blocks Planning Grant of \$150,000 to support design work for the expansion of three kindergarten and child care facilities in areas of need: JS Grey Kindergarten in Preston West, Maryborough Avenue Kindergarten in Kingsbury and Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten in Thornbury.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin calls on the State Government to:

- Provide investment and support for the creation of multipurpose Intergenerational Hubs in Reservoir West, Preston West and Preston East to integrated early years services alongside services for other age groups.
- Work with us to explore the possibility of building an Intergenerational Hub on the site of the William Ruthven Primary and Secondary School in Reservoir West.
- Work with us to identify other locations for new early facilities on school sites or other state government land, including across Northcote, Fairfield and Alphington.
- Invest in the development of a Global Learning Hub in Preston, to also include kindergarten and other early years services.

Theme 5 – Prosperous, creative and liveable Darebin

As the beating heart of Melbourne’s northern suburbs, Darebin is a proudly socio-economically diverse, multicultural, vibrant and artistic community, that is full of optimism about what is possible, and what the future can hold.

Built on the lands of our traditional owners, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and having grown and evolved through successive generations of multicultural migration, a blue-collar manufacturing industrial and social justice heritage- which has continued to morph into a rich and creative community- Darebin residents are unashamedly passionate about wanting fair and the very best outcomes for our community.

In the midst of COVID-19 having compounded many pre-existing socio-economic challenges and disadvantage across many parts of Darebin’s suburbs, now is the time for the Federal and State Governments to partner with Council to invest and support in local initiatives that can genuinely help us foster a more prosperous, creative and liveable Darebin.

Beginning with the protection of the Preston Market- considered as the heart and soul of the Darebin community which for decades has provided a welcoming, humble, affordable and diverse place where people from all walks of life come to do their weekly shop, meet with friends, and socialise whilst experiencing the diverse range of local traders selling fresh and affordable food- we can work to rejuvenate not only the broader Preston Precinct around this iconic site, but also partner around other opportunities to foster a more prosperous and liveable local community.

Whether it be through advocacy priority to expand the role and scope of the Reservoir Revitalisation Board in responding to and coordinating efforts to address socio-economic issues across broader Reservoir, calling on the State Government to convene a Working from the Suburbs and Working From Home Summit to solidify the economic and sustainability gains realised during the COVID-19 Pandemic for local communities, recognising Darebin as a Victorian centre for Creative Industries and the Arts, supporting Council to realise the full potential of a new Darebin Intercultural Hub, or working to address local graffiti and tagging issues- Council’s prosperous advocacy agenda can help us build a more liveable and resilient Darebin, now and into the future.

What we are advocating for:

- Protect the Preston Market
- Reservoir Revitalisation Board
- Economic Development, Local Business and Local Jobs
- Making Darebin a Victorian Centre for Creative Industries and The Arts
- Relocation of the Darebin Intercultural Centre
- Planning Reform
- Ensuring Development and the Built Form are Designed Liveable, Sustainably and Safely
- Graffiti and Tagging

Protect the Preston Market

The Context and Challenge

Darebin Council has long recognised and supported the role Preston Market plays in the social fabric of Darebin.

As the beating heart of the local Preston community- welcoming, humble, affordable and diverse- Preston Market is a place that for over 50 years, people from all walks of life come to do their weekly shop, meet with friends, and socialise whilst experiencing the diverse range of local traders selling fresh and affordable food and produce.

However, Preston Market is privately owned and operated, with the majority landowner having sought for several years, to undertake a major redevelopment of the site through a mix of commercial, residential and proposed construction of a new market.

In response to these plans, Council has been strongly advocating alongside our community, to protect and preserve what we love best of our market, and to prevent the Preston Market Precinct's over-development.

In the absence of the Preston Market owners committing to protect all the things about the market that the community cares about, and despite Council not being the decision maker for the site (planning control rests with the State Government and the Victorian Planning Authority), Council has been proud to help support and complement community efforts, to advocate for the protection of the Preston Market for current and future generations.

That is why Council undertook the development of 'Heart of Preston' Document (updated April 2021), which captured significant community feedback and engagement, and which has continued to guide and underpin Council's advocacy efforts with State Government.

Council's Submission (endorsed in June 2021) to the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) was highly critical of the State Government's Draft Planning Control for Preston Market and reaffirmed concerns around 80% of the market potentially being demolished under current controls, weak protection and recognition for the market's heritage value, no protections for social and cultural functions of the market, and the overall proposed development being too dense for the location.

Amongst these and other various advocacy initiatives, Darebin Council launched a Petition, which accumulated over 11,000 signatures, that called on the Victorian Planning Minister, Hon Richard Wynne MP, to exercise his powers to change the planning process to ensure the private owners protect the market in future development of the site, and help us to secure a design outcome that guarantees the market continues to serve the community at the same location for years to come.

Council's advocacy, which has also entailed meetings with Parliamentarians, Departmental and other stakeholders; as well as social media and communication opportunities over this period; has undoubtedly played a key role in the more comprehensive review of VPA's plans at this point in time, and which led to revised plans being released by the State Government in March 2022, which have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of apartments to be built on site, from the originally proposed 2,200 apartments, down to 1,200 apartments, as well as better overshadowing protections and design for open space, and improved walking and cycling connections.

However, the State Government's plans for the Preston Market itself appear to be largely unchanged. The Plan would still see most of the market demolished and rebuilt.

These plans will be presented to the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) Process, from 1st April 2022 onwards, which will be conducting hearings and receiving submissions in response to these revised plans, which Council will continue to advocate for an optimal outcome through.

Like the community and the community groups dedicated to saving Preston Market, we love the market and want to see it protected from over-development. We want its role preserved, as the heart and soul of the Darebin community, with a vibrant history, accessible and inclusive of everyone. We are doing everything we can to stand up for that.

Furthermore, with 52.9% of people living in Darebin recorded to not be eating the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables per day (compared to 51.6% across Victoria)², preserving the Preston Market to help ensure ongoing access to fresh and affordable produce remains critical to our community's health and wellbeing.

Council also recognises the role that protecting and preserving the Preston Market can play as a catalyst towards broader Preston Revitalisation opportunities. By preserving the heart and soul of Preston via the Market, we can help guide broader revitalisations efforts in a manner that maintain community, culture and vibrancy at its heart.

What Council is Doing

Council has long recognised and supported the role Preston Market plays in the social fabric of Darebin. As the beating heart of the local Preston community- welcoming, humble, affordable and diverse- Preston Market is a place where people from all walks of life come to do their weekly shop, meet with friends, and socialise whilst experiencing the diverse range of local traders selling fresh and affordable food. That is why Council developed the 'Heart of Preston' document (updated April 2021), which captured significant community feedback and engagement, and which has continued to guide and underpin Council's advocacy efforts with the State Government.

Council's submission to the State Government (endorsed in June 2021) was highly critical of the VPA's draft planning controls for Preston Market Precinct, and reaffirmed Council and our community's concerns that the State Government's plans would see around 80% of the market potentially demolished, with weak protection and recognition for the market's heritage value, no protections for social and cultural functions of the market, and the overall proposed development framework being too dense for the location.

Council has been undertaking a sustained advocacy campaign, which has included meetings with Parliamentarians, Departmental and other stakeholders; as well as social media and communication opportunities; has been centred around call to action for community to support a Change.Org petition, which has now accumulated over 11,200 signatures of support. When combined with Council's and the community's broader efforts, this advocacy has undoubtedly played a key role in influencing a more comprehensive review of VPA's plans following consultation.

Over the years, Council has commissioned and prepared its own planning investigations to inform its position, including joint funding some studies with the VPA.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Victorian Planning Authority are responsible for preparing the planning controls in the precinct and have been consulting with Council over the years.

The State Government released revised plans in March 2022, which have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of apartments to be built on site, from the originally proposed 2,200 apartments, down to 1,200 apartments, as well as better overshadowing protections and design for open space, and improved walking and cycling connections.

However, the State Government's plans for the Preston Market itself appear to be largely unchanged. The Plan would still see most of the market demolished and rebuilt.

These plans will be presented to the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) Process, from 1st April 2022 onwards, which will be conducting hearings and receiving submissions in response to these revised plans, which Council will continue to advocate for an optimal outcome through.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin Council is calling on the State Government, and the Planning Minister, to endorse a planning framework that protects what is special about the market:

- Retaining the market in its current site and current form
 - That the market must not be demolished and must remain in its current location - central to the site. Council has demonstrated it's possible to allow appropriate development within the Precinct while protecting the market.
- Retaining the use of the market, as a place for affordable fresh and diverse food that serves the northern metropolitan community
- Protecting the existing traders so they can continue to operate through the redevelopment and in the future
 - An agreement with the landowner that gives long term rent security and affordability to the current traders so they can continue to operate through the redevelopment and in the future.
- A section 173 agreement must be required to protect the use of the market, as a place for affordable fresh and diverse food that serves the northern metropolitan community.
- The market precinct is developed in a way that enshrines design excellence, the highest standards of sustainable development and provision of affordable housing, open space and community infrastructure.
- Leveraging the preservation of the Preston Market, as the catalyst towards broader Preston Revitalisation opportunities, including through the establishment of a new Preston Revitalisation Board. By preserving the heart and soul of Preston via the Market, we can help guide broader revitalisations efforts in a manner that maintain community, culture and vibrancy at its heart.

Reservoir Revitalisation Board

The Context and Challenge

Established in 2021 by the State Government and the Office of Suburban Development, the Reservoir Revitalisation Board has brought together local state and community leaders, to provide a local voice to the Victorian Government's Suburban Revitalisation Program.

Working with local communities to leverage the opportunities associated with the Reservoir Station and Level Crossing Project, and to identify opportunities for locally led-projects and initiatives to help make Reservoir thrive, the Board has work to help enhance local community amenity, ambience and wellbeing across central Reservoir, including through the delivery of over \$2.6 million in value of local initiatives and approved projects²⁴.

As one of Melbourne's largest suburbs, Reservoir is situated within the City of Darebin, is home to over 55,000 residents⁶, making up over 33% of the municipality's population, and is strategically located 12km north of the Melbourne CBD, and in the heart of Greater Melbourne's burgeoning northern region²⁴.

As a proudly socially and culturally diverse community, together with our residents' strong sense of community and pride, Reservoir's has a great number of strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged to secure new generational outcomes.

As recognised by the Office of Suburban Development, the Reservoir Station and Level Crossing Removal Project, as well as other public transport links, connect residents and visitors to Reservoir's established main street precinct, well-loved recreational and leisure destinations and diverse residential neighbourhoods²⁴.

By Council regularly partnering through the Board with various State and non-state entities, including the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR), Melbourne Water, La Trobe University and others, to Board has continued to provide for valuable engagement to coordinate and facilitate local community initiatives across central Reservoir.

However significant opportunities exist to expand the role and scope of the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, to also consider and coordinate efforts in responding to border socio-economic, health and wellbeing challenges across all of Reservoir.

As identified in *Darebin's 2020 Health and Wellbeing Profile*, Reservoir contains some of Darebin's most socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs according to the SEIFA Index, some of the city's highest proportions of low-income households, and some of the greatest health and wellbeing disparities in the municipality².

That is why a broadened scope and role of for the Reservoir Revitalisation Board can greatly assist in help identify, consider and respond to various local challenges and opportunities through a partnership approach with all relevant local organisations and agencies, in an ongoing and rolling manner.

What Council is Doing

Darebin Council has identified several opportunities that an enhanced Reservoir Revitalisation Board can consider and engage with to support a broader scale of local investments and outcomes, including through:

- Redevelopment of the Reservoir Leisure Centre, with consideration around broader health and wellbeing hub opportunities.
- Extending Tram Route 11 to Edwardes Lake in Reservoir.
- Keon Park Level Crossing Removal Project.
- The future Suburban Rail Loop via Reservoir, and interim transport measures including orbital bus services.
- Activating the Edwardes Lake Boat House, to create new socio-economic and visitation opportunities.
- Engagement with the Edwardes Lake Taskforce to consider water quality, sustainability and environmental opportunities.
- Considering the role of Merrilands Community Centre and PRACE, as part of broader Reservoir socio-economic, life-long learning and community pathways.
- Overseeing the implementation of Reservoir Industry Attraction Plan (which is currently in development).
- Re-wilding of Cheddar Road, and other local urban design, amenity and sustainability initiatives.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The establishment of the Reservoir Revitalisation Board has been a significant commitment from the State Government following, the level crossing removal project along the Reservoir Corridor, with \$2 million invested by the State, and financial, or in-kind contributions, from other project partners including Council. That have helped deliver a range of initiatives:

- #Rezza Collab
- A Safer Reservoir
- Bike it to Rezza
- Economic Analysis
- Reservoir Investment Attraction Plan
- High on Broadway
- Ramp Up Reservoir
- Reservoir Splash
- Rezza Rocks
- Youth Entrepreneurs and Leadership Program
- Reservoir Streetscape and Laneway Activation
- Extension of the Birds and Beans Community Training Café
- Greening Reservoir
- Reservoir Thrive Program
- Colour My Neighbourhood
- 3 Kool 'N' Deadly Mobile Broadcasting Van
- FUSE- Darebin's Contemporary Multi-Art Festival

What Council is asking for:

Darebin Council is calling on the State Government commit to a new and extended term and scope for the Reservoir Revitalisation Board which should consider:

- Redevelopment of the Reservoir Leisure Centre, with consideration around broader health and wellbeing hub opportunities.
- Expanding local industry, business and employment opportunities through industry attraction, retention and pathways, including around the sustainable economy.
- Improved learning opportunities in Reservoir; and consideration of the Merrilands Community Centre and PRACE, to respond to and support broader Reservoir socio-economic and lifelong learning challenges.
- A holistic approach to sustainable transport, which includes the Level Crossing Removal Project at Keon Park, extension of Tram 11 to Edwardes Lake in Reservoir, the future Suburban Rail Loop Project and bus and active transport corridors through Reservoir.
- Identifying and supporting broader environmental, sustainability and water initiatives across Reservoir, including at Edwardes Lake and the re-wilding of Cheddar Road.

Economic Development, Local Business and Local Jobs

The Context and Challenge

Combined with Darebin Council's direct support measures, the Federal Government's JobKeeper and JobSeeker Programs, as well as the State Government's Business Support Fund, Working for Victoria and Community Support Packages, play pivotal roles in supporting and sustaining Darebin's economy, local businesses and local jobs.

The Federal Government's JobKeeper payments supported 5,667 local Darebin organisations in early 2020, and a further 1,159 later in the year, with 6,826 in receipt of JobKeeper by August 2020².

The Federal Government's increased JobSeeker Payments also played a role in helping support socio-economic outcomes during COVID-19, with 4,329 local residents receiving payment in March 2020, but with the number of increasing by 5,487 additional recipients to 9,816 by October 2020².

There is a clear correlation across Darebin, both pre-and-post pandemic, of higher rates of unemployment in lower socio-economic areas, and in relative terms, the higher local socio-economic areas have had larger increases in JobSeeker recipients².

Overall Darebin had approximately 8.5% of the local 15-64-year-old population in receipt of JobSeeker and Youth Allowance in November 2020, compared to just over 8% for Greater Melbourne. Some parts of Darebin including Preston East, Reservoir West and Reservoir East saw over 10% of the population in receipt of JobSeeker or Youth Allowance².

At a State level, the State Government's Business Support Fund provided over \$89.9 million in direct economic support for local businesses, in industries ranging from hospitality, non-essential retail, accommodation, events, hairdressing and beauty services²⁵.

However, whilst these were all critical measures to help support our community through the prolonged lockdown periods, our municipality will continue to require support to:

- Continue stimulating local economic activity as part of ongoing recovery efforts.
- Respond to long standing socio-economic challenges.
- Help to build a more prosperous, vibrant and sustainable Darebin.

In considering these opportunities, Federal and State Governments could work in partnership with Darebin Council to help provided targeted ongoing support and pathways to address historic local socio-economic disadvantage, which has been compounded as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, notwithstanding the Federal and State support provided during the prolonged and evolving lockdown periods:

- Some of Melbourne's most socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs according to the SEIFA Index include Darebin's northern suburbs including Reservoir (Oakhill, Merrilands, Cheddar, Edwardes Lake), Kingsbury and Preston (East).²
- Darebin's unemployment rate has remained high 7.2% (compared to 6.5% across Victoria).²
- 56% of Darebin's population are employed in full time work (compared to 58% across Greater Melbourne).⁶
- 35% of Darebin's workforce is employed part-time (compared to 33.5 across Greater Melbourne).⁶
- Whilst over 85,000 Darebin residents are employed, there are 57,700 locally based jobs available.⁶
- Between 2020 and 2021, there was a -2.62% or -2,309 persons decline in the number of local employed residents, reducing from 88,236 to 85,927.⁶
- Between 2020 to 2021, over 1,040 local jobs have been lost, or -1.77%, from 58,616 down to 57,773.⁶

The COVID-19 Pandemic has also allowed us to further appreciate our local neighbourhoods and communities, and to re-imagine what the future may look like in terms fostering ongoing working from the suburbs opportunities for employers, organisations and workers, in the context of supporting local economies, local business, as well as sustainable and active transport outcomes.

In this regard, it is important to consider Darebin's local business and employment profile. As a proud, hardworking, diverse and resilient community, with a strong blue collar and industrial history, whose business and employment base has continued to diversify, Darebin is strategically positioned in the heart of Melbourne's north to welcome and sustain more local and regional jobs.

Darebin is home to a diverse and evolving business base, some of which consist of construction (2,180 businesses or 16.4% of local businesses), professional, scientific and technical services (1,928 or 14.5%), rental, hiring and real estate services (1,466 or 11%), transport, postal and warehousing (1,246 or 9.4%), retail trade (1,056 or 7.9%), health care and social assistance (996 or 7.5%), accommodation and food services (714 or 5.4%), manufacturing (510 or 3.8%), wholesale trade (503 or 3.8%), financial and insurance services (463 or 3.5%), arts and recreation (405 or 3%), education and training (220 or 1.7%) and electricity, gas and water services (44 or 0.3%)⁶.

Darebin is also home to a diverse and evolving local employment and jobs base, which consists of education and training (9,062 local jobs or 15.7% of local jobs), health care and social assistance (8,812 or 15.3%), retail trade (7,242 or 12.5%), manufacturing (5,395 or 9.3%), construction (4,499 or 7.8%), accommodation and food services (3,520 or 6.1%), public administration and safety (3,090 or 5.3%), professional, scientific and technical services (3,026 or 5.2%), transport, postal and warehousing (2,526 or 4.4%), wholesale trade (2,513 or 4.3%), administrative and support services (1,452 or 2.5%), arts and recreation services (989 or 1.7%), and rental, hiring and real estate (718 or 1.2%)⁶.

To help support local economic development, local business and local job outcomes, significant opportunities exist across Darebin for Federal Government, State Government and non-government support, which leverage our local economic profile and socio-economic conditions, to help position Darebin as the jobs hub for Melbourne's growing northern region, through local job, procurement, working from the suburbs and small business initiatives.

Whilst as part of broader COVID-19 recovery initiatives there is increasing advocacy to see a return of workers to the Melbourne CBD, significant opportunities also exist to ensure that local economic gains associated with working from the suburbs and local neighbourhoods is also balanced and considered, as part of the evolving future nature of return to work plans.

Considering opportunities to also leverage Darebin's major infrastructure projects, including the level crossing removal projects at Preston and Keon Park, as well as our strategic partners, including La Trobe University in Bundoora, Melbourne Polytechnic in Preston, and the Melbourne Innovation Centre, could also be considered in aligning local economic development, job and skill pathways.

What Council is Doing

Along with Council's local economic development initiatives, including our 'Love Local' Campaign, 'one-stop-shop' for business permit approvals on council land and business grant initiatives, Council established a new team to provide opportunities for those facing barriers to employment.

Furthermore, Council facilitated the State Government's Outdoor Dining Grant Program which has seen over 1,150 additional outdoor dining seats for 89 local businesses using footpath trading and 19 parklets in to help local hospitality venues serve more customers and employ more staff¹⁰.

Council also partnered with the Victorian Government to employ 110 new workers through additional roles at Darebin through the Working for Victoria Program²⁵, and has worked with the Office of Suburban Development to help facilitate Darebin's FUSE Arts Festival during March 2022, as a key economic recovery initiative across Reservoir and the wider municipality.

Federal-State Government Assistance

The Federal and State Governments respective COVID-19 support initiatives, including JobKeeper, JobSeeker, Business Support Fund, and Working for Victoria have all played key roles in sustaining local economic, job and social activity throughout the Pandemic.

The State Government's establishment of a Reservoir Revitalisation Board, has also played a key role in identifying and coordinating locally led projects, including an Economic Analysis for Reservoir, development of a Reservoir Investment Attraction Plan and much more. Significant opportunities exist for the State Government, through the Office of Suburban Development and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR), to broaden and deepen its partnership with Council to help foster new socio-economic, job and skill outcomes across Darebin.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal Government, State Government and Non-Government partnerships and support to:

- Partner with Council as part of the development of a new Darebin Economic Development Strategy, to help facilitate new local economic development, job and skill initiatives and outcomes.
- Provide ongoing Federal support through increased JobSeeker payments, as well as extended and targeted implementation of the State's Business Support, Working for Victoria, Job Advocates, and Outdoor Dining Programs to respond to the ongoing and evolving impacts of the COVID-19 across Darebin and Melbourne's North.
- State Government should commit to extend the term and scope of the Reservoir Revitalisation Board, to identify and respond to broader economic development and local job, skill and training opportunities across Reservoir now and into the future, including through Prace Merrilands Community Centre.
- State Government should establish a new Preston Revitalisation Board, to identify and respond to broader economic development, local job opportunities across Preston now and into the future.
- Provide investment towards the revitalisation and refurbishment of all of Darebin's key local retail and neighbourhood shopping precincts, including across Fairfield, Northcote, Thornbury, Preston, reservoir, Kingsbury and Bundoora.
- Prioritise Darebin's job creation and industry transition through the sustainable, circular economy and renewable energy sectors, including through identifying Darebin as the first Urban Renewable Energy Zone, and through a business case to consider the Darebin resource and Recovery Centre as a regional circular economy hub
- Support Darebin's job creation and industry transition through the region's growing and evolving food, innovation and advanced manufacturing sectors
- Investment to solidify Darebin as a Victorian Centre for Creative Industries and the Arts, including through Darebin's FUSE Festival, Northcote Town Hall Arts Centre, Darebin Intercultural Centre, Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre, Bundoora Homestead Arts Centre, and a future Darebin Global Learning Hub in Preston.
- Strategic partnerships to align and integrate Council's economic development, local job, and lifelong learning efforts to foster broader socio-economic pathways for local residents, including through major Federal-State Government infrastructure projects, Federal-State Government procurement opportunities, employment, higher education and skills pathways.
- State Government should convene a 'Working from the Suburbs' Summit, to consider the ongoing local suburban economic development, local job and sustainable transport benefits associated with a balanced return to traditional workplaces.

Making Darebin a Victorian Centre for Creative Industries and the Arts

The Context and Challenge

Led by *Darebin's Creative and Cultural Infrastructure Framework 2018*²⁶, Council has been proudly working to help grow and foster our local creative and arts communities, which have been playing increasingly important roles in Darebin's cultural and economic wellbeing.

With Victoria home to 50,000 artists, there are increasingly many who live, work and visit Darebin. In Darebin the number of residents working in the arts industry rose from 1,478 in 2011, to 1,901 in 2016, or 2.7% of Darebin residents who work in the arts sector compared to 1.9% across Victoria⁶.

*Darebin's Creative and Cultural Infrastructure Framework*²⁶ identified that in 2018, Darebin's creative sector was playing a driving role in Darebin's economic prosperity, equating to 2,577 local jobs, or 4.8% of local jobs in Darebin, and contributing \$436.2 million in Gross Regional Product, making up 7.5% of Darebin's economy. The strongest contributors defined by creative and cultural sectors across Darebin included fashion (48%), performing arts (15%), design and visual arts and crafts (10%)²⁶.

By 2018, *Darebin's Creative and Cultural Infrastructure Framework* identified that over 4,739 local registered businesses in Darebin were associated within the creative and cultural industry²⁶.

Council has proudly played a leading role to help foster and grow our local creative industries over many years, including through Darebin's annual FUSE Festival, as well as through programs and events through our facilities including the Northcote Town Hall Arts Centre, Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre, and the Bundoora Homestead Arts Centre.

Council's plans for a re-located Darebin Intercultural Centre in Preston, and a future planned Darebin Global Learning Hub in Preston, will also play key roles in supporting our creative communities going forward.

However, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and its associated lockdown and social distancing restrictions, has created unprecedented impacts for the local, regional and broader creative, arts and cultural sectors- with the sectors being one of the hardest hit.

In response, Darebin Council invested through our annual \$8.5 million arts budget to support creative recovery initiatives, to assist impacted artists and sector organisations.

Whilst along with various other key Federal and State Government measures during the Pandemic, including through the Federal Government's Restart, Investment and Sustain (RISE) Program, and the State Government's Creative Industry Support Programs, significantly more targeted investment is required to help grow Darebin's and Melbourne's northern, creative, cultural and arts sectors.

As identified in the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries in October 2021, '*Sculpting a National Cultural Plan*', Australia's cultural industries were significantly affected by COVID-19- which resulted in the closures of public venues, performance spaces, community hub, and Indigenous artistic centres.

As identified in the report, significant opportunities exist to revive cultural economic activity, jobs, events and cultural activity Australian communities, in partnership with local governments, including

through the development of a *National Cultural Strategy*, and accompanying investments for local initiatives.

Significant opportunities also exist for the Federal and State Governments to also leverage Darebin's strong and vibrant arts and cultural sector, to help support broader northern Melbourne regional visitor economy and tourism outcomes, by investing in more marketing, events and activations that can help encourage more visitors to experience Darebin's culture and creative industries as part of ongoing effects COVID-19 is continuing to have on tourism behaviour.

By replicating the approach, the State Government has adopted throughout regional Victoria, including through Regional Tourism Board and Regional Events Funding, Darebin can help lead northern metropolitan tourism recovery efforts through our creative sector.

What Council is Doing

Throughout the Pandemic, and as part of ongoing recovery efforts, Council has been playing a leading local role to help revive and sustain our local creative industries, including through:

- Development and delivery of three festivals seasons FUSE Autumn 2020, FUSE Spring 2020, FUSE Autumn 2021 and FUSE Spring 2021. Each disrupted and impacted by COVID lockdowns and pivoted to online and hybrid delivery modes.
- Development and delivery of FUSE Autumn 2022, which is directly supporting 352 artists employed across 42 locations throughout Darebin which have been activated.
- Development and delivery of 24 exhibitions and associated public programs at Bundoora Homestead Art Centre over 2020, 2021 and 2022, showcasing the work of over 300 artists in that time, either in the venue or online when disrupted by the pandemic.
- \$500,000 invested directly to support local creative industries, venues and artists as part of our COVID response and recovery measures.
- Honouring of artist contracts and payments during times of unplanned lockdowns and cancellations.

Federal-State Government Assistance

Council has for many years welcomed support, and worked closely with, the Australia Council for the Arts, and through Creative Victoria to support local creative, arts, and cultural events, initiatives and programs.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal Government and State Government support to:

- Partner to develop a *National Cultural Plan* to support the short, medium- and long-term needs of the creative and cultural sectors across local communities.
- Federal and State investment that directly supports Darebin's creative and cultural industries as part of immediate and ongoing COVID-19 recovery efforts.
- Identify Darebin as a Victorian Centre for Creative Industries and the Arts, and partner with Council to identify and continue to invest in local creative facilities, events, programs, initiatives and visitation opportunities across the municipality.
- Establishment a Regional Creative Industries and Tourism Board for Northern Metropolitan Melbourne, which is accompanied by a dedicated Northern Melbourne Regional Creative Industries, Visitor and Events Fund.

- Ongoing partnership and investment to grow Darebin's annual FUSE Festival to support more local artists, and broader regional visitor economy outcomes
- Investment towards the construction of Darebin's Intercultural Hub, and a future Darebin Global Learning Hub in Preston

Relocation of the Darebin Intercultural Centre

The Context and Challenge

Situated on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the City of Darebin is now home to one of Victoria's largest and most diverse communities in the realms of culture, language, religion, socioeconomic background, employment status, occupation, age, and housing needs.

At the 2016 Census, Darebin was home to 1,167 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people- one of the largest proportions of Aboriginal residents of the 31 municipalities in Greater Melbourne- and home 48,842 residents who were born overseas, with 25% arriving in Australia in the five years prior¹.

However, as our city's economic, cultural, and social prosperity evolves, many in our municipality, particularly from traditionally vulnerable community cohorts that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and multicultural communities, continue to experience significant challenges.

According to the Socio-Economic Index of Areas (SEIFA), Darebin continues to remain relatively disadvantaged compared to Greater Melbourne and Victoria, particularly around employment, health, mental health, and wellbeing outcomes¹.

With over one-sixth of Darebin's population also aged over 60¹¹, and the number of residents aged between 70 and 84 years making up 8.2% of our local population (compared to 7.7% across Greater Melbourne) ⁶, Darebin's growing older and diverse communities also continue to require a range of facilities, services, and support to help meet evolving local cultural demands and needs.

That is why for many years, Council has supported the work of the Darebin Intercultural Centre from the Old Preston Courthouse Location at 59A Roseberry Avenue in Preston, as a dedicated space in strengthen our community's resilience and social fabric through intercultural and intergenerational development, engagement, and celebration.

However, in recognition growing community demand and need for additional intercultural resources, services, and activities from a refurbished location- and particularly in the context of Darebin's ongoing commitment to seek recognition and support for Aboriginal People- in December 2019 Darebin endorsed a plan to relocate the Intercultural Centre from the Old Preston Courthouse to the Darebin City Council Municipal Building at 350 High Street Preston.

Along with providing capacity for additional services from a refurbished location, relocating the Intercultural Centre to Council's Municipal Building at 350 High Street Preston, also provides a meaningful step towards our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reclaiming our Council's traditional and colonial inspired municipal building and spaces, which is to be transformed into a new place of welcome, culture, inclusion, and celebration.

What Council is Doing

Along with Council's various other initiatives to support our Aboriginal, multicultural, and diverse communities, in December 2019 Darebin endorsed a plan to relocate the Intercultural Centre from the Old Preston Courthouse to the Darebin City Council Municipal Building at 350 High Street Preston.

As part of this, Council invested in and completed, and community consultation and master plan process around the redesign of the Council Municipal Building and exterior on High Street in Preston, to accommodate the relocation of Darebin's new Intercultural Centre.

Throughout 2020-21, Council in partnership with Indigenous landscaping consultant, Garawana Creative, and Sibling Architecture, worked alongside a short-term Community Reference Group (CRG) and the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (Wurundjeri) to inform the key elements in the concept design phase.

This co-designed approach provided for a wholistic Darebin Intercultural Precinct vision that includes internal works to ensure a relocated Centre that is welcoming, inclusive, culturally safe and fit-for-purpose; as well as external landscaping that transform the external spaces of the municipal building on Gower and High Streets, with landscaping, seating and programmable spaces that soften the Colonial era architecture and helps to create a Centre that is welcoming and inclusive to all cultures.

The enhanced spaces for the new Centre will also accommodate more intercultural engagement activities through a range of additional programs, workshops, forums, panel discussions, resources, community facilities and much more. Council is working with the Wurundjeri community, local community, relevant peak bodies, and other local, state, and national partners around the co-design of the new Centre and its associated future programs.

The Master Plan has outlined a staged approach around the construction and delivery of the new Darebin Intercultural Centre, at High Street Preston, which includes:

- Estimated and Indicative Total Project and Precinct Cost (across all stages) - \$3.03 million:
 - *First Stage:* \$2 million - preliminary investigations, designs, relocation and internal building refurbishment works, minor landscaping works, wayfinding signage, upgrades to entrance ramps to ensure disability compliance (currently being delivered by Council)
 - *Second Stage:* \$1.03 million indicative investment required - realise full precinct vision (external works) as articulated by the CRG and Wurundjeri in partnership with Indigenous landscape architect. Includes external demolition and site preparation, installation of external performance spaces, seating, fire pit, native grasses and shrubs, and external lighting features.
 - *Third Stage:* \$700,000 indicative investment required – co-investment into short-term and medium-term programs that focus on elevating and enabling vulnerable community cohorts to lead initiatives that build resilience, wellbeing and foster socio-economic outcomes at the local and regional level from the new Intercultural Centre in Preston.

Stage 1 the relocation project is now underway, through Council's \$2 million commitment over 2021-22 and 2022-23. Construction is due to commence from early 2022 and be completed by late 2022.

However significant scope remains for Federal and State Government support to help us deliver Stages 2 and 3 of the full Intercultural Centre Precinct Vision, as well as to support and provide new Federal and State programs, resources, and services to operate from the new location to facilitate enhanced intercultural outcomes for the Darebin community.

Federal-State Government Assistance

While Council remains highly appreciative of the various investments that Federal and State Government have made over the years to support local indigenous, multicultural, and diverse communities, a landmark opportunity exists for the Federal and State Government to partner with Council through a new Intercultural Centre in Preston.

Darebin has also welcomed and ascertained support from various key stakeholders for the new Centre, including the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Australian Human Rights Commission, and Welcoming Cities.

However Federal and State partnerships to invest towards the construction and delivery of new programs through the Intercultural Centre remain open.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on Federal and State Government investment and support to:

- Partner with Darebin City Council to construct and deliver the full \$3.03 million (3 stages) vision for the new Darebin Intercultural Centre in High Street Preston.
- As a priority, invest up to \$1.03 million to deliver the remaining external works associated with Stage 2 of the project, which are specifically designed to make the Centre welcoming, inclusive, culturally safe and appropriately acknowledging Traditional Owners, and as co-designed and endorsed by Garawana landscape architect, Wurundjeri and the Council's CRG.
- Partner with Darebin and co-invest in short term and medium-term programs that focus on elevating and enabling vulnerable community cohorts to lead initiatives that build resilience, wellbeing and foster socio-economic outcomes at the local and regional level from the new Intercultural Centre in Preston.

By partnering with Darebin to help deliver the full vision around a new Intercultural Centre at High Street Preston, the Federal and State Governments can help in supporting Council's aspiration to foster a more prosperous, creative and liveable Darebin now, and into the future.

Planning Reform

The Context and Challenge

The planning system is critical for ensuring that new development meets contemporary standards, enable economic development, and ensure new housing is built to meet the needs of our growing population.

Planning sets out what can be built where, and the nature of what can be built. The Planning Scheme and System are critical for creating liveable, sustainable, accessible, resilient and welcoming communities, and for providing for the housing needs for our growing population. Planning enables economic development and is fundamentally connected to planning for our transport network.

There are significant opportunities for improvements in the planning system to strengthen key standards, to provide more certainty for communities, and developers, and also for it to operate more effectively and efficiently.

However, these improvements should improve, not reduce, community involvement, and they should strengthen key standards to provide certainty, not weaken them.

Improvements should invest new technologies and digital transformation to simplify, automate and speed up planning processes, rather than cutting consultation steps or cutting standards. Major local precinct decisions should also be left with local governments.

The Victorian Government has been considering a range of planning system reforms. While there has been limited information available to local government, a number of these risk significantly reducing the ability of communities and their councils to influence the future of their neighbourhoods.

A key concern for Darebin is the Development Facilitation Program, which provides a channel for developers to by-pass local government assessment of planning applications and receive a fast-tracked approval from the Victorian Government.

Concerns across a range of municipalities, including Darebin, with this process include:

- The Victorian Government and DEWLP would remain heavily dependent on the expertise of councils to assess applications in their entirety (including Engineering, Heritage, ESD).
- The State Government, not Councils, would receive planning fees for providing advice; meaning that other ratepayers end up having to foot the bill for assessing major developments.
- the lack of transparency, and removal of public participation in decision making.
- Removes decision making from the authority with long term responsibility for enforcement, for management of the local road network and parking and with knowledge of the local area.
- Lack of clarity for all parties regarding processing timeframes; agreed processes and consistent decision making within local places.
- Experience has shown that Victorian Government intervention has not reduced times or created certainty for the development community.
- Often approvals not granted by councils can be rushed, resulting in lower quality outcomes for the local community

Council does not support changes to the planning system or planning practices, which increase Ministerial call-ins, and-or create multiple pathways for major developers with significant financial resources and influence.

Council maintains it is best placed to make decisions on developments within its own area, largely due to our local knowledge and connection to our community.

The recent announcement by the Victorian Government to abandon the social housing levy, and simultaneously abandon the development facilitation program, and other (yet undefined) planning reforms, continues to remain an ongoing concern at the local government level.

Nonetheless, existing legislation still enables the Minister for Planning to intervene and 'call-in' developments.

Darebin City Council has received a number of these requests in relation to a major developments, including at 30-32 St Georges Road, 47-49 Showers Street, and 32-42 Oakover Road, Preston; 223 Separate Street Northcote as well as the Northland shopping centre.

It is fair for local councils and communities to be engaged, consulted and to guide local planning processes as to ensure local developments are designed and delivered in line with community expectations, particularly given it is local communities who have to live with planning decisions for a lifetime.

What Council is Doing

Darebin City Council continues to engage with a number of neighbouring municipalities to discuss the reforms and issues arising. A general agreement has been struck to undertake collective action if necessary. Council has participated in the M9 group of councils to discuss similar concerns.

Furthermore, at a local level, Council have recently introduced a new Developer Contributions Plan, which seeks to assist in the funding of Darebin's infrastructure needs by introducing a new up-front capital contribution from development projects in the City that require planning or building permission.

Council has established a priority development stream in its Statutory Planning function to fast track social housing and major development in the Municipality.

Council is investing in significant process improvement and digitisation aimed at making the planning function easier for developers and residents, and more efficient.

What Darebin Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling for the State Government to:

- Ensuring the Development Facilitation Program remains abandoned
- Leave planning decisions with local governments for major local precincts and developments. The Minister for Planning should not use their powers to 'call-in' private mixed use developments, and instead allow Council to negotiate and assess applications in line with the Darebin Planning Scheme.
- Share State Government's transport models with local governments to ensure that the transport and congestion impacts of large developments can be adequately assessed without incurring the high cost of having this work re-done.
- Partner with local councils on planning reform to improve the efficiency and processing times within the Victorian planning system. Potential reforms to explore include:
 - State Government to establish a one stop online application portal for all parties (decision makers, applicants, residents, referral and other authorities – like a SPEAR), which includes payment mechanisms, and provide support to Councils to roll out its use.
 - Addressing the skills shortages in planning, building, engineering, health and project management (and related professions) through graduate level training programs, centralised training, facilitating skilled migrants, etc.

- Re-introduction of the Expert Assistance Panel by DELWP to fast track major strategic projects and planning reform projects at the council level; avoiding the need for individual Council's to have to undertake their own lengthy and difficult procurement processes in order to deal with overflow work.
- Provide financial and other support to Council to upgrade their customer service facilities to deal with Covid-19 related changes required.
- Partner with Council's to support implementation of local Developer Contribution Plans, to ensure new developments contribute their fair share to enhancing local amenities, facilities and services for the broader community
- Simplify and standardise developer contributions scheme, open space levies in established parts of Melbourne to ensure that necessary community infrastructure is adequately provided for as the population grows.
- Continue investing in social housing and introduce mandatory inclusionary zones so that developments in areas close to services, jobs and transport are required to provide social housing.
- Support mandatory heights to provide certainty for communities and developers.
- Rescode reform currently being considered should be changed significantly to ensure that neighbour character can be protected.

Ensuring development and the built form are designed liveable, sustainably and safely

The Context and Challenge

The City of Darebin is currently experiencing rapid and significant development change.

Contextually, Darebin's proximity to Melbourne's CBD and major health and education institutions, good access to public transport, and availability of residential and brownfield development sites are becoming increasingly attractive to the property development market.

The forecasted population for the City of Darebin is 230,118 by 2041, an increase of approximately 68,509.⁶

To accommodate this expected population increase it is anticipated that by this time, new townhouse and apartment developments will become more common.

The planning system is currently not setting high enough standards on sustainability. Buildings developed today will be a key part of our built environment when global warming impacts affects current and future generations. Buildings need to be more resilient and environmentally sustainable.

Furthermore more, ensuring the design of all future developments enhance local amenity and liveability, can play leading roles in enhancing perceptions of local community safety.

What Council is Doing

In the past few years, Darebin City Council has undertaken extensive work to respond to the growing number of new development applications and address design quality for new townhouses and apartment developments.

One of key initiatives is the development of the Design Excellence Program as an integrated approach to improving design quality within Darebin to create sustainable and liveable neighbourhoods that will stand the test of time and address the climate emergency. Key features of the project include:

- Dedicated officer to champion and lead design excellence.
- Holistic design excellence program including a range of initiatives at various levels.
- Council to take leadership in good design by walking the talk.
- Internal capacity building for planners through regular training and workshops to improve decision making.

One of the key deliverables for the program includes development of two documents namely Darebin Good Design Guide – Apartment Development and Darebin Good Design Guide – Medium Density Development. These guideline documents build on existing objectives and standards in the planning scheme as well as fill the gap where required by providing diagrams and images of preferred design outcomes.

Darebin Good Design Guides have been largely well received by the industry along with some Council's expressing strong desire to replicate them for their own local areas. There are challenges in implementing some of the requirements as they are not formal part of the planning scheme and go above and beyond what is required in the planning scheme.

Darebin is partnering with the Council Alliance of Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) to elevate environmentally sustainable development standards, which is a group of Councils working together in the absence of a state-wide ESD policy.

Darebin is also calling for the Preston Market Precinct, and other renewal sites and precincts to be an 'all electric site' and no new gas connections and to be a renewable energy powered site that maximises solar polar and utilises micro grid battery storage.

Council made a submission to the Victorian Parliament's Apartment Design Standards Inquiry, and appeared as a witness, to help influence and support recommendations through the inquiry around better designed and constructed apartment developments.

Council has established a priority development stream for major planning applications and to prioritise social housing applications.

Council has leased its own land at a peppercorn rent for development of new social housing at Town Hall Ave in Preston. Housing Choices Australia have been selected and construction is starting in 2022.

We welcome recent State Government Improvements

Design of new developments in Victoria is being facilitated through the Victorian Planning Scheme Clause 57, Clause 58 and Better Apartment Design Standards which were introduced in 2015.

Introduction of these standards has been a significant step in improving the design quality of apartments in Victoria as before these standards there was not much guidance in the planning scheme on apartment developments.

Better Apartment Design Standards included significant guidance of the size of the apartments, size of the rooms, balconies, etc. Yet, it did not provide much guidance on key issues like access to natural light and building separation, which can have a significant impact on the amenity of the apartments.

The state government has also announced that if the federal government does not increase energy efficiency standards for new buildings via the building code of Australia, it will act locally in Victoria and increase these standards to 7-star energy efficiency. This will be a significant benefit to residents, owners and tenants when it comes in that will reduce running costs of homes, make them more resilient to heat waves and help reduce fuel poverty.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin City Council is calling on state government to improve the design standards for new development to make sure that any new development that we build now is liveable and sustainable and can stand the test of time to address climate emergency. Some of the key areas of improvement include:

- Improved Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) requirements to ensure that new development is contributing to net zero carbon and resilient against increasing temperatures and reduces reliance on artificial heating and cooling.
- Improve building separation standards and lightwell standards to provide natural light and outlook in new apartment developments.
- Improved minimum standards for habitable rooms as well as private open space for new townhouses as well as apartment developments.
- Improved communal open space requirements to ensure new developments help create a sense of community and provide passive recreation space for residents.
- Improved landscaping requirements for townhouses and well as apartment developments along with requirement to plant more trees and provide enough irrigation to address urban heat island.
- Improve tree protection.
- Simplify processes for securing contributions to community infrastructure from new developments to meet the needs of growing populations including for open space.

Graffiti and Tagging

The Context and Challenge

Darebin City Council is committed to creating a prosperous and liveable Darebin, by providing a clean, vibrant and safe environment for residents and visitors.

However, 'graffiti', as well as 'tagging', essentially refer to any markings applied to property without permission, has continued to remain an ongoing challenge in this regard across Darebin, as well as Melbourne's broader northern region.

Whilst graffiti may on its own appear innocuous, in the absence of a coordinated approach, it can play a detrimental role in influencing overall perceptions of community safety and standards of community amenity across our neighbourhoods, which can discourage and deter residents from fully participating and engaging within their community. If graffiti is not removed and can also potentially attract further antisocial behaviour and vandalism to a neighbourhood²⁸.

Council has continued to receive an increasing number of community requests for the removal of graffiti across the municipality, with 564 requests in 2015-16, 724 requests in 2016-17, and 1,059 requests in 2017-18. Of these requests, 36.7% are for properties located in Northcote, followed by Preston with 29.1%, Reservoir with 6.1%, Thornbury with 13.3%, Fairfield with 5.95% and Alphington 3.5%. Council's 2017-18 Community Survey found that 59.4% of local respondents felt that graffiti was a problem in the City of Darebin²⁸.

This graffiti causes damage- to both public and private property and infrastructure- and costs council and our community money to respond to, clean up and prevent. Whilst Council works closely with Victoria Police, the Department of Justice and other entities around the prevention and mitigation of graffiti- including through the distribution of graffiti removal kits- the removal of graffiti has cost local ratepayers almost \$1 million between 2014-2018 alone²⁸.

In response to this, Council has developed the *Darebin Graffiti Management Strategy* which recognises the negative impact that graffiti can have on the amenity of our city.

In doing so, through *Darebin's Graffiti Management Strategy*, Council seeks to present a balanced graffiti management approach, incorporating an understanding of graffiti culture; prevention; the expectations of the Darebin community, and an evidence-based knowledge about how graffiti can be effectively reduced.

Darebin's strategy promotes a whole-of-community response to graffiti management that includes Council, residents, businesses, artists, community organisations and those who write graffiti. It also draws a clear distinction between 'graffiti' as any marking applied without permission, and 'street art' that is created on property with permission.

Council's strategy also acknowledges however that in some instances, graffiti may be completed without the consent of the property owner, yet still be found aesthetically pleasing and to many observers may seem to enhance the aesthetics of public space. In such cases, graffiti may then gain the status of legality and considered street art with the approval of the property owner and community.

Darebin considers street art programs, such as murals and legal walls, as important ways to prevent graffiti, enhance community amenity, and to engage young people by fostering cultural and creative development in a safe, legal and appropriate environment and locations. Council supports an annual number of local murals as part of our graffiti prevention strategy. Respect for the artistic and creative thought that has gone into the mural can act as a deterrent to graffiti tagging, and can form part of a proactive strategy in minimising graffiti, brightening up a dull area or wall, and to promote a positive message around the opportunities for street art amongst the community and young people.

However, *The Graffiti Prevention Act 2007* as the key State Government tool to its graffiti management approach. identifies illegal graffiti as a serious offence that can attract penalties including heavy fines or imprisonment; empowers police authorities with the right to search for and seize prescribed graffiti implements in certain circumstances and provides local governments with increased powers and responsibilities regarding the removal of graffiti on private property.

Significant opportunities exist for the State Government to partner with Darebin Council to address and prevent local graffiti issues across the municipality to enhance local liveability and amenity.

What Council is Doing

Darebin City Council has been active in the space of graffiti management since 2008 and has initiated and led a wide variety of programs aimed at removing and preventing graffiti.

From 2013, Council committed significant resources to improve graffiti management, including through a once off city-wide clean-up of graffiti, the centralization of all removal activities under the coordination of a Darebin Graffiti Management Officer, a dedicated budget for prevention and the implementation of a dedicated graffiti management strategy.

State Government Assistance

While the Victorian Government invests in a range of welcome programs and efforts through the Department of Justice, to help address graffiti issues, the introduction in 2021 of a Victorian Graffiti Register (VICGR) has been a welcome initiative²⁹.

The VICGR enables users, such as council workers or members of the public, to record graffiti via the app or website, as soon as they see it and while they're on the move. It will enable councils to identify specific problem taggers, or identify graffiti hotspots, and report them to Victoria Police for further investigation.

The VICGR provides access to real-time event data on the number of graffiti offences, types of graffiti incidents, hot-spot mapping, images of the tag, costs to remove the graffiti and the contact information of property owners.

However, whilst a welcome step, the VICGR also provides the catalyst for the State Government to consider greater investment and support for local councils, including Darebin, to continue enhancing local responses to, cleaning up, and prevention of local graffiti challenges.

What Council is asking for:

Darebin is calling on State Government, Department of Justice and Victoria Police to partner with Council to:

- Provide greater and ongoing investment, resources and support to respond to, clean up, and prevent graffiti across the Darebin municipality.
- Support the maintenance of public amenity through the rapid removal of graffiti on Council and community assets.
- Support the community to rapidly remove graffiti from private property.
- Encourage and facilitate street art and creative murals in key locations across Darebin as a key tool in preventing graffiti and enhancing local street scapes.
- Support community education and diversion programs to prevent graffiti.
- Support and facilitate the enforcement of the law with respect to Graffiti matters across Darebin.

Implementation

Following the completion and endorsement of the Darebin Advocacy Strategy (2022-2026), a new 12-month Advocacy Platform will be developed on a rolling annual basis.

Advocacy Platform development

The Advocacy Platform will consider and refine priorities, based on the following Advocacy Priorities Framework Principles:

- Contains limited and a streamlined number of advocacy priorities and asks
- Whether a priority has national, state regional and/or local significance.
- Aligns asks where relevant, to Federal-State priorities, and in a manner that leads to a dedicated Darebin based community advocacy ask or outcome.
- Whether the priority is contained in Council's forward budget and project pipelines of proposed facilities, programs or initiatives, and could receive investment towards its delivery to alleviate Council's investment and resource commitments.
- Contains well prepared and informed asks.
- Utilises data and research to build a strong evidence base.
- Opportunities to seek commitments around a pilot, trial, feasibility, master plan or business case around a project or initiative.
- Considers community expectations around local advocacy priorities.

A new high level and possible 12-month Advocacy Platform for 2022 that is proposed for discussion, consideration, refinement and feedback at the upcoming Councillor Advocacy Workshop in early April 2022 is outlined as follows.

Darebin City Council is seeking Federal and State Government partnership towards a Darebin Community Advocacy Support Package, to help make Darebin a more prosperous, vibrant and liveable place through:

Prosperous, Creative and Liveable Darebin
1. Protect the Preston Market
2. Preston Revitalisation Board
3. Reservoir Revitalisation Board- <i>expanded role, scope and investments</i>
4. Making Darebin a Victorian Centre for Creative Industries and the Arts
5. Local Businesses and Local Jobs- <i>Working from the Suburbs and Working from Home Summit</i>
6. Community Safety, Graffiti and Tagging

Community Wellbeing and Infrastructure
7. Reservoir Leisure Centre- Health and Wellbeing Hub Business Case
8. Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre
9. Darebin Intercultural Centre
10. Preston Global Learning Hub and Library – Business Case and Feasibility
11. John Cain Memorial Park- <i>Melbourne's Northern Community Sport Precinct</i>

Fairness and Equity

12. Women and Gender Equity

- *Orange Door Service (State)*
- *Peri-Natal Health and Wellbeing Hub (Federal-State)*

13. Mental Health and Wellbeing

- *Headspace for Darebin (Federal)*
- *Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub (State)*

Environment, Climate Change and Circular Economy

14. Climate Change, Climate Emergency and Renewable Energy

- *Darebin identified as the first metropolitan Urban Renewable Energy Zone*

15. Circular Economy, Waste and Recycling

- *Darebin Resource and Recovery Centre- Business Case*

16. Darebin's Open Space, Biodiversity and Waterways

- *Edgars Creek and Edwardes Lake Taskforce*
- *Ruthven Wetlands*

Sustainable Transport and Connectivity

17. Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure:

- *Extend Tram Route 11 to Edwardes Lake*
- *Reservoir SRL, Interim Electric Bus Route & Feasibility Study*
- *Level Crossing Removal Projects*
- *Active Transport*
- *Road Safety*

Calendar of activities

Following the completion of a new 2022 Advocacy Platform, the following calendar of advocacy activities is proposed to be finalised to complement endorsed advocacy priorities, and which will also seek to capture and incorporate Council's various other advocacy and campaigning activities, including through the 'Protect Preston Market' Campaign.

Whilst based on 2022 timelines and milestones, this highly-level calendar will be refined and refreshed on an annual basis to articulate specific activities, and to align with Federal and State decision making processes which at a high level for 2022 includes:

Month	Fed-State Milestone	Council Milestone
January		Council advocacy activities
February	Federal-State Governments advance Budget consideration for May Budgets	Council Meeting Advocacy Report (ALGA) Council advocacy activities
March	Federal Budget 2022 (*just for 2022)	Draft Council Budget Council Meeting Advocacy Report- Council Endorse new 4-year Advocacy Strategy (this document)
April	Federal Election likely to be called during April	Council Meeting Advocacy Report- Council Endorse new 12 Month Advocacy Platform (with limited and refined priorities) Council write and forward the new Darebin Advocacy Platform to Federal Government, State Government, Local MPs, Key Stakeholders and Community Organisations- and then to commence advocacy, engagement and campaigning activities around associated priorities
May	Federal Budget (usually May) Federal Election 2022 likely State Budget	Council Budget finalised/implementation Council Commence implementation of Advocacy Strategy/Platform activities
June	New Federal Parliament/Government Elected State Government enters pre-November election phase	Council ALGA NGA Assembly Canberra (Federal Parliament MP Lobbying) Council advocacy activities
July	New Federal Parliament/Government in place	Council advocacy activities

	State Government pre-November election phase	
August	New Federal Parliament/Government in place State Government pre-November election phase	Council advocacy activities
September	New Federal Parliament/Government in place State Government pre-November election phase	Council advocacy activities
October	New Federal Parliament/Government in place State Government pre-November election phase Federal-State Governments usually commence consideration of Budget cycle priorities and preparations for following Financial Year	Council Meeting Advocacy Report-Update Council advocacy activities
November	*State Election 2022 (every 4 years Nov) New Federal Parliament/Government in place	Council Mayoral Term/Cycle Council commence review, refresh and update the Advocacy 12 Month Platform for the 2023 Federal-State cycle
December	Federal-State Governments commence/advance Budget consideration for following year	Council complete review, refresh and update the Advocacy 12 Month Platform for the 2023 Federal-State cycle

Suggested method of engagement and contact program- sequencing

Federal-State Parliamentarians	Other Stakeholder and Community
(Cohort 1) Local State and Federal MPs <i>(lower and upper house)</i>	(Cohort 6) Community Organisations <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i> (Cohort 7) Strategic and Regional Stakeholders <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i>
(Cohort 2) State Ministers	(Cohort 8) State Government Departments and Entities <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i> (Cohort 6) Community Organisations <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i> (Cohort 7) Strategic and Regional Stakeholders <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i>
(Cohort 3) Federal Ministers	(Cohort 9) Federal Government Departments and Entities <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i> (Cohort 6) Community Organisations <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i> (Cohort 7) Strategic and Regional Stakeholders <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i>
(Cohort 4) Federal Shadow Ministers	(Cohort 6) Community Organisations <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i> (Cohort 7) Strategic and Regional Stakeholders <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i>
(Cohort 5) State Shadow Ministers and Other Non-Government Parliamentarians	(Cohort 6) Community Organisations <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i> (Cohort 7) Strategic and Regional Stakeholders <i>(concurrently/ongoing)</i>

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