City of Darebin

# THORNBURY (HIGH STREET & ST GEORGES ROAD) ACTIVITY CENTRE PROGRAM

## Submission

27/10/2025

### Acknowledgement of Country

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 and Torres Strait Islander 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.

# Council endorsed position

Council expresses its support for the intent of the Victorian Government's *Housing Statement* and *Activity Centre Program* to update planning controls to enable the delivery of more good quality homes within the two Train and Tram Zone Activity Centres along High Street and St Georges Road, Thornbury (the *Thornbury Cluster*).

This document is Council's submission for the Thornbury Cluster. In addition, Council is seeking the following key asks:

- ensure the inner catchment of the Thornbury Activity Centre is not treated as a single, uniform zone, but instead recognises the distinct character, constraints, and access limitations of individual streets.
- continue to plan for primary and secondary school capacity to accommodate the projected increase in families and children resulting from future housing development in the area.
- maintain mid-rise development across High Street and St Georges Road cores, capped at 6 stories, except in specific circumstances that meet the additional criteria set out in the submission.
- allow taller buildings, only considered on large, master-planned sites and supported by a robust public benefits framework under the Built Form Overlay, but have a maximum height of 10 storeys on such sites.
- work with Council to develop a social/public/affordable housing target of at least 5-10% in the Activity Centre cores.
- request the opportunity to work further with the Victorian Government to support detailed planning controls and infrastructure investment into the Thornbury Cluster
- engage further with the community as planning progresses, enabling genuine feedback on proposals.
- provide information on available funding streams and contributions to support local infrastructure delivery.
- ensure that the proposed list of infrastructure projects remains confidential until such time that the State Government and Council have thoroughly collaborated and reached agreement.

The resolutions of Council, set out above, shall take precedence over any corresponding content contained within the submission, as outlined in the following report.

# Introduction and summary

Darebin City Council welcomes the opportunity to partner with the Victorian Government to improve planning and investment in two new Train and Tram Zone activity centres at High Street and St Georges Road in Thornbury (the 'Thornbury Cluster'). We support the State Government's reform objectives under the *Housing Statement* and the Activity Centre Program (ACP) expansion, which seek to deliver more homes in well-serviced locations close to existing tram and train corridors.

Both High Street and St Georges Road are well-connected areas with significant potential to accommodate strategic housing growth and stimulate local economies. Each corridor has distinct character, heritage, and landscape qualities that should be respected and enhanced through any new planning framework. At the same time, this growth should be supported with investment into community infrastructure, affordable housing and improvements to transport, public realm and open space outcomes.

Our submission draws on local knowledge, prior planning and advocacy work, and council policies to offer clear guidance and ensure that ACP expansion delivers high-quality, context-sensitive outcomes. It is organised around the following priority themes: (i) housing, built form, and neighbourhood character; (ii) land use and economic development; (iii) transport and sustainable mobility; (iv) environmental sustainability and climate resilience; (v) infrastructure contributions and value capture; and (vi) community engagement and governance.

For each theme, we outline the local context and rationale for our advocacy, followed by clear, actionable asks that, if adopted, will advance our shared objectives: better housing outcomes, protection of local character, and supporting vibrant, sustainable communities through locally responsive, technically sound and community-aligned plans.

## Housing, built form and neighbourhood character

High Street is a traditional heritage streetscape with fine-grain shopfronts experiencing development pressure. Planning controls should support mid-rise growth to respect heritage significance and improve transitions down to adjoining low-rise residential areas.

The proposed heights of six-eight storeys are generally appropriate for the High Street core. Taller heights are supported for large, strategically consolidated sites if supported by masterplanning and meeting requirements of a public benefit framework alongside access and network analysis to inform infrastructure upgrades for the centre.

The proposed heights of six storeys for the St Georges Road core are supported, with its lower urban scale and fragmented land holdings, requires zoning, height, and consolidation incentives tailored to unlock its mixed-use potential without compromising heritage or amenity.

Heritage overlays, lot size constraints, and narrow frontages necessitate flexible building envelopes with strong interface and transition controls. Mandatory floor area ratios (FARs) and site coverage controls for larger sites (above 1000m2) should be considered to manage massing, amenity, and promoting design excellence.

## Land use and economic development

High Street is a bustling commercial and cultural hub, supporting a diverse mix of hospitality, retail, small business, and creative industries framing Darebin's night-time economy and local identity. Preserving the fine-grain, small business character while supporting new economic opportunities is central. Strategic rezoning and master planned development of larger strategic sites can unlock more commercial floor space, improve public facilities, and deliver housing close to transport.

St Georges Road currently underperforms but holds potential through careful mixed-use redevelopment which should be supported by market-informed rezoning. Ground floor activation through fine-grain, adaptable commercial tenancies can support vibrant, walkable main streets.

## Transport and sustainable mobility

Both corridors are well served by tram and rail but face challenges including pedestrian safety, limited footpath widths, poor cycling connections, and competing traffic priorities. Upgrades are needed to tram stops to meet accessibility standards, improve pedestrian crossings, and provide seamless walking and cycling networks. Encouraging rear lane vehicle access and reducing crossovers on main streets will improve street activation and safety. Better coordination between transit modes and investment in active transport infrastructure are vital for sustainable, connected growth. Dynamic parking strategies can support mode shift. Nevertheless, parking management must move beyond vehicle access and safety and be reframed as a community asset informed by inclusive engagement and long-term integrated transport planning.

## Environmental sustainability and climate resilience

The corridors have limited canopy cover, fragmented green spaces, and face risks from flooding and heat stress. New developments should embed deep soil planting, canopy trees, water sensitive urban design (WSUD), and resilient building design aligned with Darebin's Climate Emergency Plan. Mandatory Environmentally Sustainable Design assessments and rigorous performance standards are essential to achieving net-zero targets and improving occupant wellbeing. Application of higher-density zones to flood-prone areas should be carefully considered to ensure long-term community safety and resilience. Integration of stormwater management and urban greening within streetscape upgrades will bolster climate resilience and biodiversity.

## Infrastructure contributions and value capture

Coordinated infrastructure upgrades are critical to support intensification and maintain liveability. Infrastructure Contributions Plans (ICPs) should support increased densities and the share the uplift in value with the broader community, supporting streetscape improvements, community facilities, and transport upgrades. Early and ongoing collaboration between State and Council will ensure infrastructure delivery aligns with local asset management and community priorities. Value capture from large and strategic sites should fund public realm enhancements, affordable housing, and improved connectivity within the centres. Sufficient funding and flexible mechanisms are needed to meet growing infrastructure demands amid rate-capped environments.

## Community engagement and governance

Successful planning relies on inclusive, transparent, and meaningful community engagement, with clear communication of evidence, modelling, and options. Robust evaluation, monitoring, and independent review processes are critical to accountable decision-making. Addressing broader housing supply challenges requires government attention to market constraints including construction costs and labour availability. Engagement with diverse community voices and the development sector will facilitate better-aligned, equitable, and feasible planning outcomes.

# Housing, built form and neighbourhood character

## Existing context and development pressures

### High Street

High Street features an eclectic urban spine distinguished by heritage shopfronts that complement a vibrant creative economy. The area blends charm of existing heritage main street shopfronts framed by quieter residential streets. The Junction precinct to the immediate north of the centre has recent developments, typically reaching five to six storeys and up to 18 storeys on large former industrial sites.

This heritage-rich environment is subject to significant development pressure. Sensitive locations require clear height limits and thoughtful interface management to protect the fine-grain shopfront character and transitional edges adjoining low-rise neighbourhoods. New planning controls should facilitate appropriate housing density while safeguarding design excellence.

### St Georges Road

The St Georges Road corridor presents a more modest urban scale, comprising low-rise precincts with tree-lined streets and landscaped front gardens. Although the wide transport corridor suggests potential for taller built form, constraints such as small lot sizes, restrictive subdivision patterns, and limited laneway access, particularly within Residential Growth Zone areas, impede development.

Without strategic lot consolidation and clearly defined built form parameters, numerous strategic sites remain underutilised and underdeveloped. The commercial strip is currently underperforming, and proposed controls should seek to improve street-level vibrancy.

A tailored approach encompassing zoning, height controls, lot consolidation incentives, and measures to curb underdevelopment is essential. This approach should deliver coordinated, context-sensitive outcomes that uphold design excellence and ensure smooth transitions to surrounding low-density neighbourhoods and heritage precincts such as the Thornbury Park Estate[1].

## Draft vision

The proposed draft vision for the Thornbury Cluster is drawn from the Thornbury Community Reference Group, Statements of Advice, community engagement findings, transport aspirations for the place and existing council visions.

The vision highlights High Street, St Georges Road and the rail line as key assets that can support housing growth. It suggests that High Street and St Georges Road in Thornbury will become connected, vibrant centres anchored by local heritage and identity. Together, they will offer diverse housing, thriving local businesses, and welcoming public spaces, ensuring Thornbury remains inclusive and safe for everyone. High Street will continue as the area's cultural heart, blending energetic independent businesses and hospitality with respectful new residential development, while St Georges Road will grow as a greener, more connected neighbourhood centre with mid-rise buildings and improved movement networks enhancing the local streetscape and community life.

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*[1] Darebin adopted Amendment C191dare on 28 November 2022 and is awaiting Ministerial approval applying a permanent Heritage Overlay. See* [Your Say: Thornbury Park Estate]

The draft vision demonstrates strong alignment with Council's strategic goals, fostering a vibrant, connected, prosperous, liveable, and sustainable community.

## Planning for housing

### Housing targets and activity centre planning guidance

To provide planning certainty, we encourage the state to release housing targets for each centre. These targets should balance housing growth with the need to support quality and sustainability in development outcomes while offering a variety of housing options for families, singles, seniors, and diverse household needs, including affordable and accessible homes.

The transition to a new activity centre hierarchy based on precinct typologies requires updated guidance within the planning scheme. This should be supported by revised Planning Practice Notes that provide clear direction for structure planning in activity centres.

### Affordable housing

Darebin faces a significant shortfall in affordable housing, with over 10,000 low- and middle-income households needing assistance. Current voluntary agreements with developers are insufficient to meet this demand. Additionally, the sale of public land as part of public housing renewal reduces opportunities to create meaningful, affordable housing alternatives in established communities.

Given the scale of the Activity Centre Program, it is essential that buildings with significant heights include a mandatory requirement to provide affordable housing. These contributions should be gifted or include long-term tenancy arrangements, offering leases of 25 years or more, to ensure tenant security and stability.

## Built form controls and response to existing character

### Growth index, building heights and precinct typologies

The ACP links housing density to a housing growth index and precinct typology developed under the pilot program.

The Train and Tram Zone centres should be of lower order than Darebin's major activity centres. A lower *Housing Growth Index* for Thornbury cluster centres is supported. Planning controls in both corridors should prioritise mid-rise scale, supported by consolidation incentives that overcome narrow lot subdivisions and fragmented ownership.

The plans propose modest increase in preferred building heights along St Georges Road from 4-5 storeys (allowed under existing DDOs) to 6 storeys as the whole corridor is characterised as a 'fringe precinct'. In the High Street core, 6 storeys are proposed for blocks with heritage sensitivities mainly in the northern half (or heritage main street precinct), and up to 8 storeys further south where there are no heritage constraints (or main street precinct). These heights align with current 5 to 7 storey developments and are supported on adequately sized sites without narrow lot limitations.

However, in the absence of any modelling and testing information, the rationale for allowing 12-storey developments on large sites like the Psarakos Shopping Centre and the car park at 578 High Street (opposite Croxton Hotel) is unclear. Compared to Preston Activity Centre, where heights do not exceed 10 storeys, taller built forms along High Street should be permitted only on strategically consolidated sites linked to master planning requirements and strong public benefit frameworks.

#### *Controls for narrow lots*

Standardised built form controls, including prescriptive upper-level setbacks, may be problematic when applied to narrow or shallow lots. In such instances, achieving proposed building heights may

not be feasible which would lead to underdevelopment, inconsistent streetscape profile, and poor urban design and amenity outcomes.

Most of the lots within the High Street and St Georges Road cores are narrower than 22m (see Figure 5) integrate flexibility around the proposed side and rear setbacks while encouraging lot consolidation. Site coverage limits and mandatory floor area ratios (FARs) can offer stronger tools to manage amenity, ensuring both feasibility and high-quality outcomes, particularly on such constrained sites.

### *Opportunities on consolidated sites to deliver public benefits*

Built Form Overlay provisions linked to Floor Area Ratio uplift (FAU) should be applied to consolidated sites to enable consistent delivery of public benefits such as affordable housing, community infrastructure, public space, and adaptable and affordable commercial space for creative uses.

### *Master planning requirement for large opportunity and limited sensitivities sites in High Street Core*

Development applications on large opportunity and limited sensitivities sites in the High Street centre should be supported by master plans demonstrating design excellence and public benefit delivery. Development uplift on these sites should be tied to clear public benefit frameworks, including affordable and social housing, cultural and creative spaces, and publicly accessible open space (see Figure 1).

Mandatory Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and site coverage controls, modelled on the successful approach in Preston (High Street) activity centre, can enable design flexibility, encourage passive design, and ensure buildings deliver community benefits should they exceed preferred heights. For High Street sites, without such measures, allowing heights beyond mid-rise (i.e. greater than risks inconsistent urban form without any community benefit outcomes).

Introducing mandatory FARs can offer a robust mechanism to manage built form density and massing while protecting key views and allowing varied building forms.

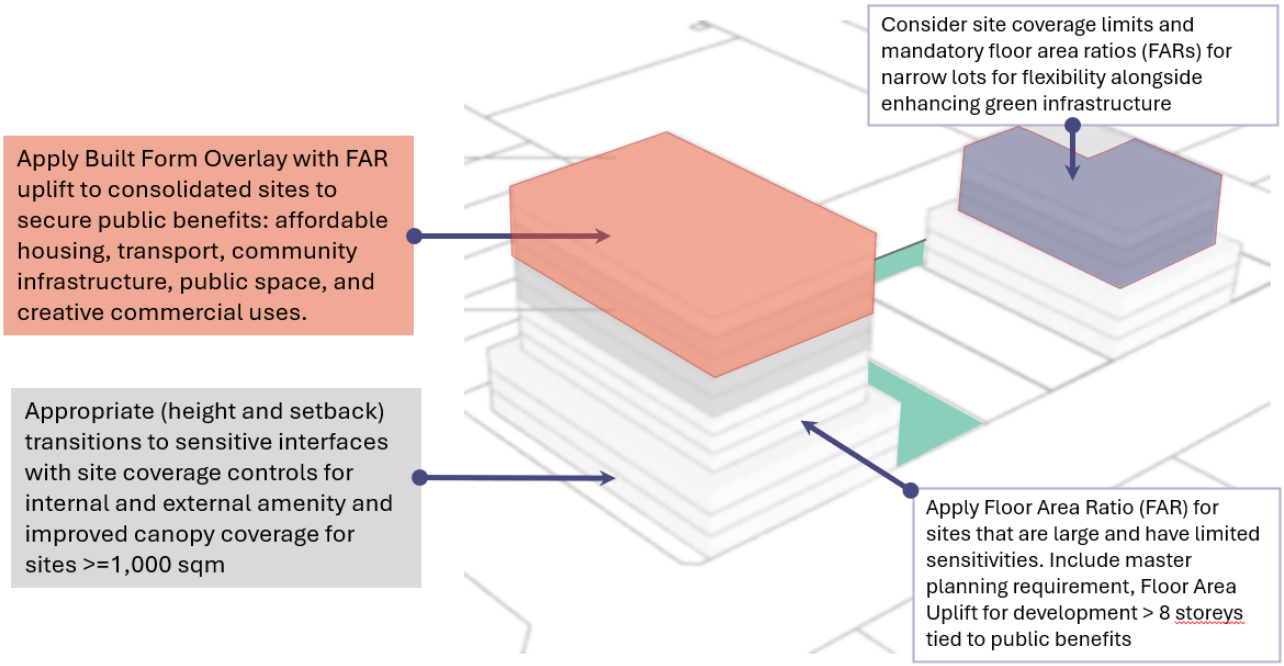


*Figure 1 Applying tools available in the Built Form Overlay with FAR uplift tied to public benefits framework*

## Heritage streetscape and transition to sensitive interfaces

The defining character of the High Street corridor lies in its fine-grain heritage streetscapes. Narrow lot widths, fragmented ownership, and historic shopfronts create unique constraints that limit the use of standardised built form controls such as broad upper-level setbacks or minimal ground-level setbacks.

To preserve local character, new development should respect existing heritage places and precincts and maintain the visibility of historic shopfront fabric. Context-driven setbacks and sensitive design treatments assist in managing abrupt or bulky interfaces with adjoining residential and heritage areas.

Limited details are provided on how interfaces between the core areas and catchments are transitioned. Both High Street and St Georges Road abut low-scale residential neighbourhoods, requiring careful transition management. Inadequate or generic rear setback controls risk overshadowing, overlooking, and abrupt scale changes. For example, in key precincts like those adjacent to Plow Street heritage areas, development should balance intensification with heritage protection.

Intensification in catchments is reliant on lot consolidation requirements and therefore are likely to be uneven in the centre. It is therefore critical that built form guidelines include clear rear interface provisions such as recessed massing, deep soil planting, and sensitive architectural treatment to safeguard amenity and neighbourhood character while allowing activity centre growth.

## Sunlight, rooftop solar and public realm protection

Current plans do not adequately address public realm sunlight access. This omission risks generating poorly lit, wind-affected streetscapes that diminish pedestrian comfort and street activation. Protection of sunlight at key times of day, especially on footpaths such as High Street, public gathering spaces, and parks, should be embedded in the Built Form Overlay (BFO).

Site coverage controls should apply to all sites including narrow lot to avoid large lower-level floor plates that result in poor internal and external amenity by impeding on daylight, ventilation, and privacy.

Clear guidance is needed to ensure overshadowing impacts on neighbouring solar panels in the catchment areas are considered and consistently assessed, particularly for buildings between-four to six storeys.

## Ground floor activation and corner lots

To support vibrant, inclusive centres, vehicle access should be confined to rear lanes or side streets to preserve continuous, active frontages along High Street and St Georges Road. Ground floor activation should be mandatory on commercial frontages, with adaptable, fine-grain tenancies that reinforce local character and support small businesses.

A continuous street wall height in High Street core is essential to maintain cohesive urban form and prevent over-dominant massing (see Figure 2).

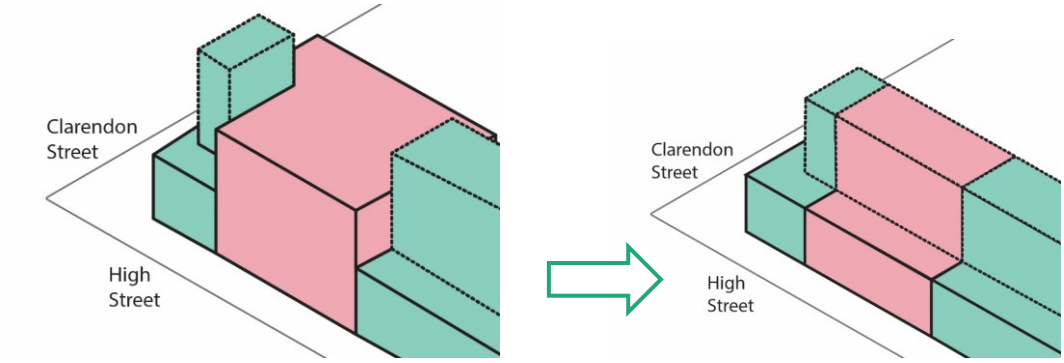


*Figure 2 Varying street-walls for example High Street and Clarendon Street intersection (left) should be made consistent (right)*

At prominent street intersections, corner lots should be designed to provide pedestrian refuge areas, supporting street-level activity and lingering. These corners may allow slightly higher street wall heights than adjacent properties to emphasise their prominence. Such height variations should be guided by design codes that ensure activation, respond to context, and integrate the corner seamlessly into the streetscape.

Council supports clear and consistent standards for building frontages that maximise street activation, transparency, and public amenity. Council welcomes requirements for highly transparent entries or windows along public frontages, and strongly discourages large blank walls, above-ground parking, and vehicle crossovers on main streets, as these detract from pedestrian comfort and disrupt the street's character.

Where parking is required, it should be sleeved with active commercial uses to maintain lively ground-level activity. Council also supports well-specified pedestrian connections through large sites, with ground floor activation along new laneways to ensure safety and vibrancy. Finally, Council welcomes landscaped setbacks for deep soil and canopy trees, especially along St Georges Road, to enhance greening and street amenity.

## Planning reform and its cumulative impact

The Victorian Government has introduced a series of planning reforms to accelerate housing delivery, including the Townhouse and Low-Rise Code (up to three storeys), revised standards for four-storey apartments under Clause 57, and the proposed Mid-Rise Code for buildings between four and six storeys. These plans would introduce another layer of deemed-to-comply requirements in the Built Form Overlay for buildings up to 12 storeys. These initiatives rely heavily on deemed-to-comply standards to streamline assessment processes.

However, the expansion of "deemed to comply" pathways and their widespread use raises concerns of cumulative impacts and risks undermining community input and third-party rights, particularly in established neighbourhoods. For example, a one-size-fits-all approvals process carries the risk of perpetuating design shortcomings, as it limits discretionary assessments. This approach undermines the performance-based principles of the planning system and reduces opportunities to promote design excellence in new housing developments. Councils should be empowered to guide high-quality outcomes that provide community benefits such as public realm improvements and consider design issues such as use of external materials prior to approving permits for developments.

As part of the ACP, further guidance towards clear implementation, analysis of impacts on the community (erosion of third-party rights) and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the reforms are resulting in fair planning processes along with achieving good development and sustainability outcomes should be considered.

## Operation of the Built Form Overlay

A new Schedule to the Built Form Overlay (BFO) presents a significant number of assessment criteria in addition to existing Clause 58 apartment design standards. The BFP schedule should provide clear definitions to improve clarity and reduce misinterpretation, improve consistency in modelling periods to test overshadowing impacts, strengthen application requirements to reflect the scale and complexity of new developments, and improve assessment rigour and transparency in decision-making by clearly aligning the decision guidelines to in the schedule.

### *Requirements*

Overshadowing impacts on pedestrian streets and boulevards should be assessed using defined terms and standardised criteria to protect public realm quality and reflect broader assessment periods, such as April to September (e.g. City of Melbourne Design and Development Overlay - DD02).

Minimum preferred heights should be specified for all precincts within the core areas to avoid underdevelopment.

### *Definitions*

To reduce ambiguity and support consistent decision-making across precincts, particularly where discretionary assessments are limited, the schedule should include clear definitions for terms such as “boulevards/green streets”, “pedestrian /sunny streets” and “building scale” etc.

### *Application requirements*

Application requirements should be strengthened to specify:

- detail urban context analysis for larger proposals in sites of 1,000sqm or over,
- detail Sustainable Design Assessment (SDA) incorporating Sustainability Management Plans (SMPs)
- clear terminology such as Landscape Plans
- shadow diagrams requirements, including dates, times, and content
- detailed 3D renders for all multilevel buildings and digital 3D model for buildings and works proposed on large sites (e.g. > 1,000sqm)
- mandatory Acoustic Assessments for sites near tram corridors and adjacent residential zones to protect amenity of future occupiers.

### *Decision guidelines*

Strengthening the connection between decision guidelines and assessment criteria, and restoring discretion for merit-based evaluation, is essential to achieving high-quality planning outcomes.

The decision guidelines in their current form have weak alignment with the assessment standards specified in the schedule and head provision. Headings such as *building scale, detailed design,* and *sustainability* are not clearly linked to the criteria used to assess applications. This disconnect results in fragmented assessments, where individual components of a proposal may be reviewed in detail, but the overall merits, such as massing, scale, and integrated design quality etc. are not adequately considered.

This fragmentation undermines the ability of Councils to exercise discretion in evaluating proposals holistically. Without clear links between decision guidelines and assessment criteria, it becomes difficult to secure good planning and design outcomes, particularly in complex or sensitive contexts. The loss of discretion also limits opportunities to negotiate public benefits, such as improved public

realm or enhanced sustainability performance, especially where proposals exceed preferred building heights.

Compounding this issue is the broader context of recent planning reforms, which have introduced multiple codes and standards to particular provisions which apply simultaneously to development proposals where BFO operates. Without clear coordination, guidance and articulation of how these particular provisions interact with BFO standards, the assessment process becomes onerous, making it harder to achieve integrated and context-sensitive outcomes. To address these issues, the following adjustments are recommended:

- Link decision guideline headings such as building scale, detailed design, and sustainability directly to the assessment criteria or standards specified within the BFO schedule and head provision.
- Introduce a public benefits requirement where development proposals seek to exceed preferred building heights, with incentives tied to lot consolidation and improved design outcomes.
- Ensure guidelines support holistic assessment, allowing Councils to consider the full merits of a proposal, including its contribution to the public realm, architectural quality, and environmental performance.

#### *Other matters*

Corrections to the BFO head provisions around definitions such as Floor Area Ratio should be clarified, including requirements that trigger mandatory conditions for minor works and extensions to existing properties.

### Changes to existing Design and Development Overlays (DDO)

#### *DDO5 - High Street corridor view protection*

Portions of High Street north of Brickworks Lane and east of All Nations Park are currently included in DDO5, which was originally introduced to protect views from All Nations Park towards the Doncaster Ridgeline, Dandenong Ranges, Willsmere, and Yarra Bend Parklands. Since DDO14 now applies to the Northcote Activity Centre and provides more specific protection for key views from All Nations Park towards the Macedon Ranges, the application of DDO5 to parcels along High Street between Darebin Road and Woolton Avenue is no longer necessary. On this basis, the removal of DDO5 controls from these parcels is supported.

#### *DDO16 St Georges Road corridor*

DDO16 currently manages built form along the St Georges Road corridor, with height limits of 4–5 storeys across several core precincts. Residential Growth Zone (RGZ) land is capped at 4 storeys (except 5 storeys between Hutton and Fyffe Streets), while Commercial land (C1Z) land is capped at 5 storeys.

With the introduction of Built Form Overlay (BFO) controls under the ACP and the application of HCTZ1 standards potentially referencing mid-rise codes for 4-to-6 storey developments, DDO16 is no longer needed to the extents of the centre. However, any change to existing DDO schedules should be further consulted with Council to correct any inconsistencies (such as maps and precinct boundaries) arising from amending the planning scheme under ACP. The state is encouraged to ‘copy across’ the existing strategic work into the BFO schedule where it aligns with and improves design outcomes along St Georges Road.

#### *DDO13 Gadd Street, Northcote*

Gadd Street redevelopment area upon which DDO13 was applied was implemented to guide site-specific redevelopment at Gadd Street, Northcote, ensuring development scales respect heritage

buildings and significant features. With redevelopment completed successfully and subdivided, the DDO has fulfilled its intent, and removal is supported.

## Proposed catchment extents for both centres


*Figure 3 Map of State proposed catchment and core areas under the state government's Activity Centre Program*

Council supports applying Housing Choice and Transport Zones in the Thornbury activity centre catchments that are more closely aligned with recently adopted *Housing Strategy, 2025*[2]. Developed following two rounds of community engagement, this strategy outlines a 15-year vision and framework for managing residential growth by focusing on areas with good access to services, public transport and employment centres.

To balance growth with neighbourhood character, the strategy identifies preferred locations for housing change ranging from minimal, incremental, increased to substantial change areas. Council expects Increased and Substantial Change areas, located within walkable catchments of activity centres and public transport, to accommodate most new housing (see Figure 4)

[2] *Darebin's Housing Strategy was endorsed on 25 August 2025. See Your Say: Planning for Housing*

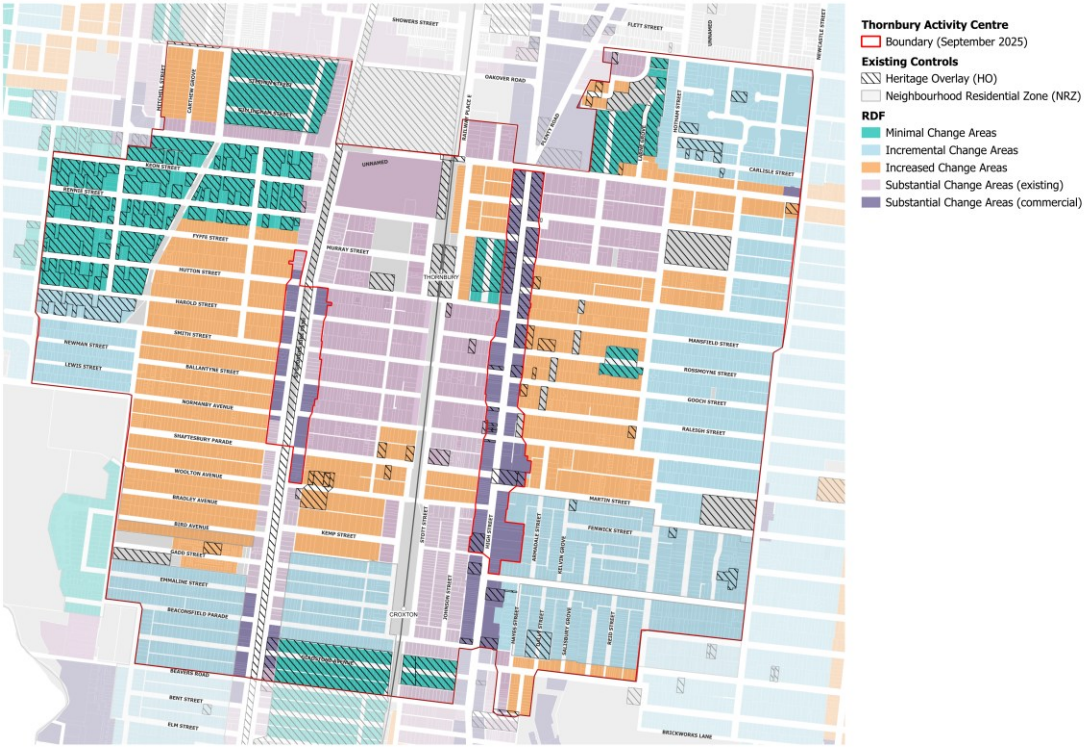


*Figure 4 Map showing the Darebin Housing Strategy 2025 Residential Development Framework in Thornbury Cluster*

## St Georges Road corridor and catchment areas

The outer catchment designation for residential areas west of the St Georges Road corridor with potential rezoning to Housing Choice and Transport Zone 2 (HCTZ2) is supported. This designation recognises its status as a lower-order centre with accessibility limitations partly created by the arterial nature of St Georges Road.

Council supports a Housing Growth Index 1 classification for the St Georges Road centre, recognising its potential to accommodate increased residential density. However, this should be matched with proportionate catchment boundaries aligned with Activity Centre Program (ACP) methodology. Notably, comparable centres such as East Malvern, Seddon and Middle Footscray under ACP, limit their catchments to approximately 400m, with none extending to 800 metres.

Therefore, a 400m catchment boundary should be applied to St Georges Road centre. This will also ensure growth is appropriately scaled and responsive to local context and reflects flooding and heritage constraints. For example, areas along Bracken Reserve Melbourne Water Drain are subject to the potential for more severe flooding, these should be excluded from HCTZ rezoning. See section on Environment Sustainability for more details.

### *Miller Street & Gilbert Street Neighbourhood Centre*

The Miller and Gilbert streets' neighbourhood activity centre is identified for substantial change in Council's Housing Strategy and should be planned as an independent centre, separated from the Thornbury Cluster. Any rezoning to the to this area should be progressed via a Council-led amendment.

## Areas between the transit corridors and east of High Street

Much of the area between High Street and St Georges Road has been identified in the inner catchment with potential application of Housing Choice and Transport Zone 1 (HCTZ1). While this area aligns closely with Darebin's Housing Strategy, areas to the south are either under a Heritage

Overlay or Neighbourhood Residential Zone with intact character. This is also shown by the clustering of lots smaller than 500sqm in area (see Figure 5). This means more than three lots would need to consolidate to reach the intended 6-storey development potential under HCTZ1.

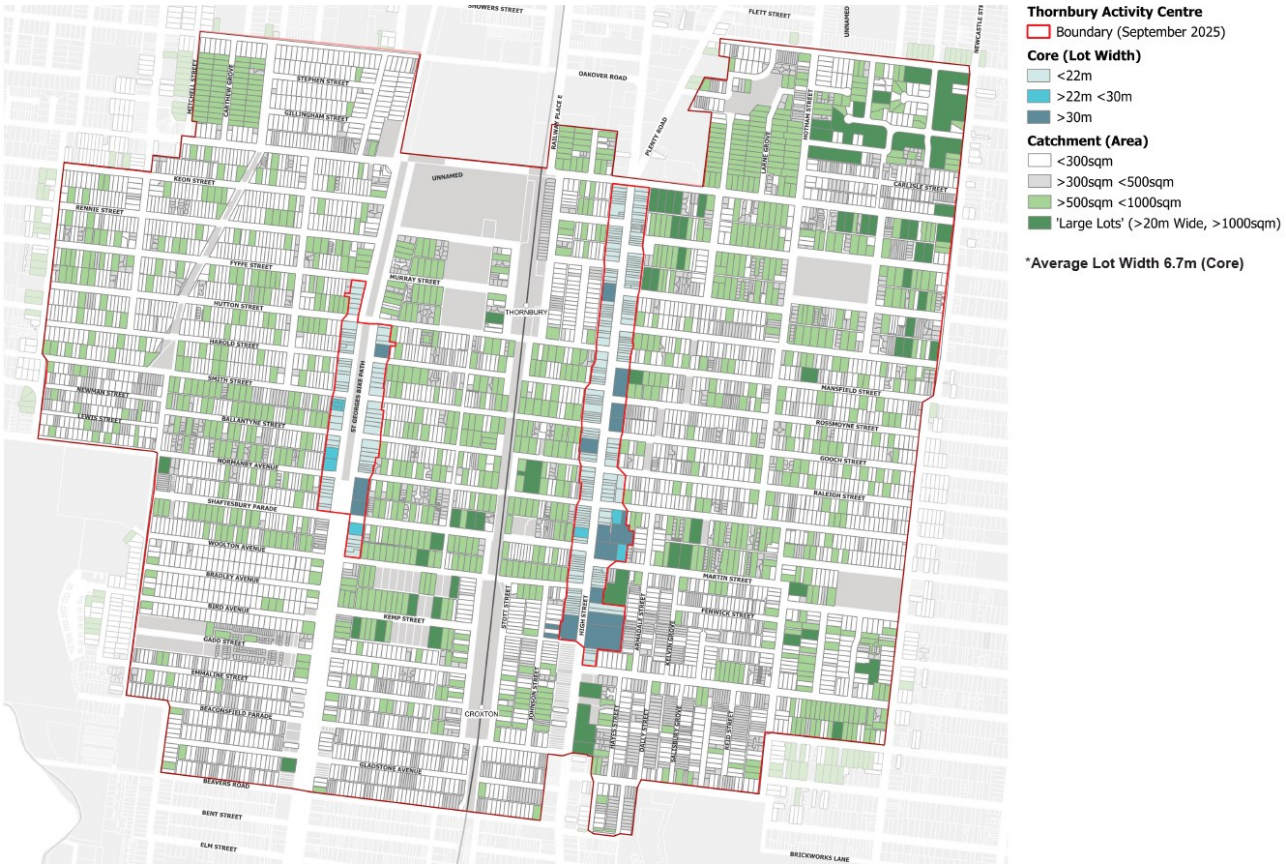


*Figure 5 Analysis of lot sizes and widths in core and catchment areas of Thornbury*

For these reasons, rezoning current residential zones to HCTZ1 should be applied to accessible areas that are under substantial change category. Areas nominated for increased change, particularly within 400m of the High Street core may be able to accommodate greater intensification but do suffer from issue of lot consolidation as many lots are smaller than 500sqm. Careful consideration should be given to inclusion of these in the inner catchment.

Areas south and east that are identified under minimal and incremental change because of Heritage Overlay or existing Neighbourhood Residential Zone should be excluded from, inner catchment. This would ensure that the valued local character is respected in the planning scheme.

Finally, several linear parcels along VicTrack land are shown under inner catchment classification over Transport Zone. These should be rectified in the final plans.

## Summary of strategic adjustments to proposed Thornbury Cluster catchments

in summary, the following strategic adjustments to the catchment areas is proposed to align Activity Centre Plan closely with Darebin Housing Strategy (see Figure 6 and Figure 7).

- Support 'Inner Catchment' type for areas within 400 metres of the proposed High Street core and within 'Increased Change' category in the Darebin Housing Strategy.
- Support 'Outer Catchment' type to areas west of the St Georges Road corridor and apply 400m catchment to this lowest-order centre.
- Apply 'Outer Catchment' type to all areas under Heritage Overlay and Neighbourhood Residential Zone.

- Exclude areas from catchments where environmental constraints (flood and heritage) may limit high density development.
- Exclude intact commercial areas within the Northcote Major Activity Centre.

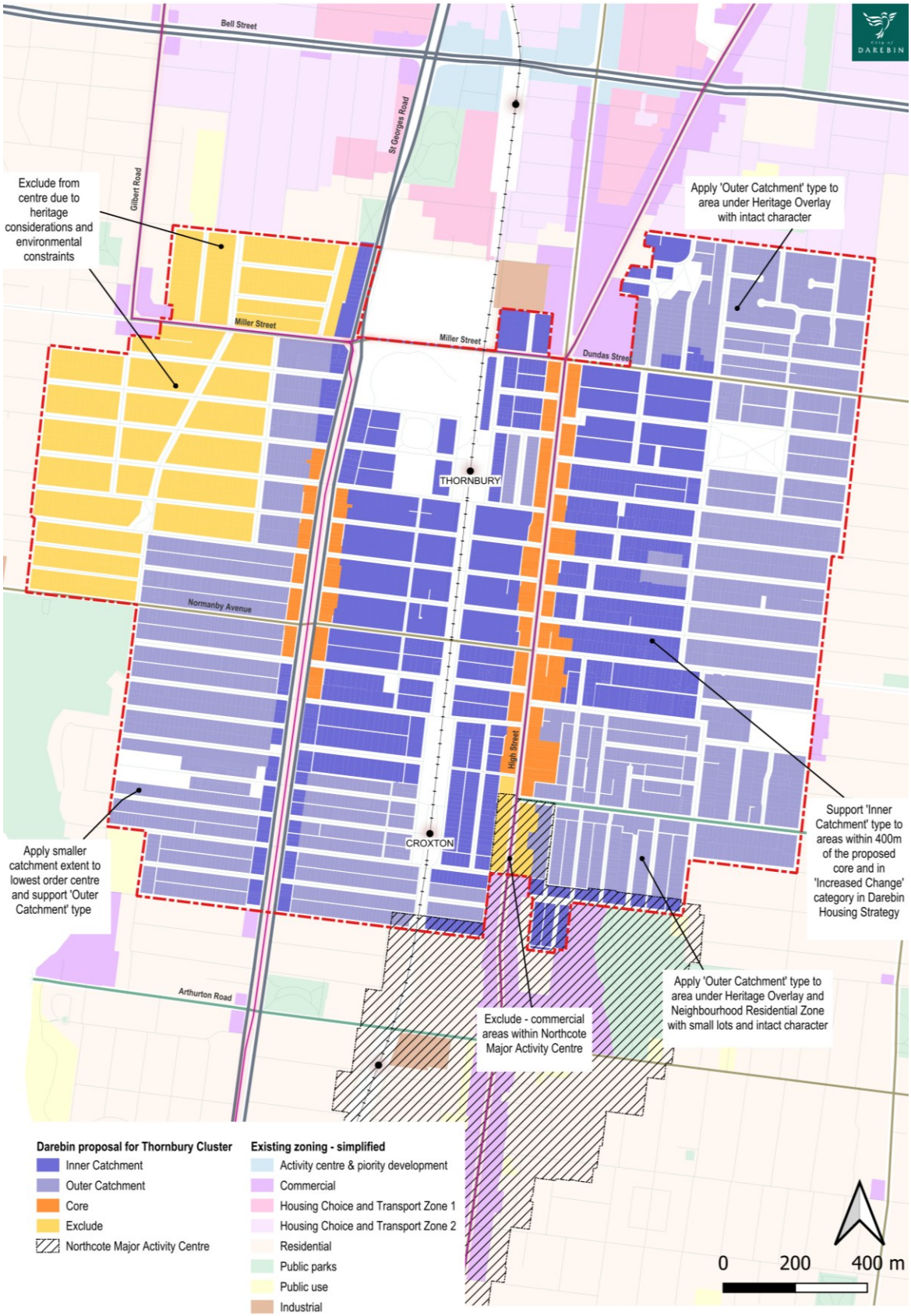


*Figure 6 Map of Council proposed changes to State's catchment areas to align the Darebin Housing Strategy 2025*


*Figure 7 Side by Side Comparison of State and Council-amended catchment maps*

## Key asks

- Direct housing growth to activity centre aligned with Council's Housing Strategy 2025, supported by transparent housing targets and consistent methodologies while offering a variety of housing options.
- Require affordable housing contributions for larger developments and support additional social housing on public land.
- Encourage master-planned redevelopment on consolidated large opportunity and limited sensitive sites, linking public benefit outcomes to planning incentives such as floor area uplifts.
- Maintain mid-rise development across High Street and St Georges Road cores, with taller buildings only considered on large, master-planned sites and supported by a robust public benefits framework under the Built Form Overlay.
- Apply enforceable design standards including front setbacks, context-sensitive setbacks to sensitive interfaces (e.g. adjacent to heritage and residential), material finishes, and servicing arrangements, with flexibility for site-specific design excellence.
- Provide testing and modelling information assessing feasibility, amenity, and urban design outcomes used to support proposed building heights and controls.
- Introduce mandatory floor area ratio (FAR) and site coverage controls, especially for sites over 1,000sqm, to manage bulk and encourage design flexibility.
- Introduce roof and podium landscaping requirements across all built form typologies and lower deep soil planting thresholds to 1,000sqm sites to support urban greening.
- Incentivise lot consolidation (with fine grain ground floor tenancies) in Built Form Overlay, similar to Housing Choice and Transport Zone schedule to enable coordinated redevelopment and discourage underdevelopment in core areas.
- Ensure new built form controls protect heritage buildings and precincts, with sensitive transitions to low-rise and heritage areas through setbacks and stepped massing and protection from overshadowing of existing rooftop solar panels on neighbouring properties.
- Expand definitions of sensitive interfaces from cores to adjacent residential areas as identified in foundation mapping of existing conditions, including rear boundaries adjoining heritage precincts and existing neighbourhood residential zones, and apply consistent setbacks aligned with design guides.
- Update Planning Practice Notes to reflect the new activity centre hierarchy and typology frameworks.

- Retain key design criteria in overlays to protect sun access to key sunny and green streets and parks as identified in the existing conditions plan, and amenity, especially where overlay removals are proposed.
- Recognise High Street as a 'sunny street' and apply appropriate overshadowing controls to support incremental development and clearly identify green streets and boulevards in BFO schedule.
- Provide standards to support design excellence and responsiveness to site constraints and remove inconsistencies around definitions, application requirements, decision guidelines and mandatory requirements in BFO.
- Mandate minimum active frontage standards and design-responsive setback controls across activity centres, with special emphasis on prominent corners, mixed-use blocks, and walkable environments.
- Apply rezoning and catchment boundaries closely aligned with Darebin's endorsed Housing Strategy, aligning inner catchment (HCTZ1) in areas that are walkable, provide service access, and avoiding adverse impacts on areas with heritage overlay or flooding constraints.
- Apply 400m overall catchment for St Georges Road centre within is a Housing Growth index 1 centre, consistent with other centres in the Activity Centre Program
- Exclude land north-west of St Georges Road from the HCTZ catchment due to identified flood risk and heritage constraints.
- Rectify catchment mapping errors over VicTrack land, land in Transport Zone 1 and within heritage areas.

## Land use and economic development

Positioned between the Major Activity Centres of Preston and Northcote, Thornbury acts as a bridge along both High Street and St Georges Road. This strategic location gives Thornbury a unique function, connecting key economic and social hubs while supporting local character and community life.

### High Street core

High Street is a vibrant main street known for its mix of hospitality venues, specialty retail, small businesses and creative industries. This diversity creates a walkable and lively environment that draws visitors from across Darebin and beyond. Bars, restaurants, live music venues and markets contribute to a strong night-time economy, which is central to the area's cultural identity.

#### Development pressures and character preservation

Thornbury is absorbing medium to higher-density residential growth, which is increasing demand for retail and hospitality services. However, limited land availability and fragmented ownership present challenges. Rising rents and redevelopment pressures risk displacing affordable creative spaces and small businesses, elements that are essential to High Street's distinctiveness and economic diversity.

Precincts such as Croxton and Thornbury Central offer strong potential for mixed-use development. These areas could accommodate new shops and office spaces suited to small businesses. Thornbury Village, with its niche retail character, would benefit from heritage-sensitive upgrades and targeted support for local hospitality and retail sectors.

Overall, to protect and enhance the area's character, new developments should maintain active, fine-grain ground-floor tenancies, support retail, hospitality, creative industries and small businesses and reinforce High Street's vibrant and walkable street character. Coordinating these uses with

public realm improvements will help preserve main street cultural vibrancy, support a resilient local business ecosystem and foster social interaction community cohesion.

### Key sites for rezoning in High Street core

Council supports, in principle, the increase of commercial land within the centre to support housing growth in the Thornbury Activity Centre Program, where strategically justified and carefully considered.

The St Mary's Roman Catholic Church complex, which includes a primary school, spans contiguous parcels at 726 High Street, 8 Mansfield Street and 1–5 Rossmoyne Street. The site is currently split between the Commercial 1 Zone (C1Z) and General Residential Zone Schedule 2 (GRZ2), with 726 High Street and 8 Mansfield Street subject to Heritage Overlay HO46, which recognises the site as a significant heritage place.

Council supports the consolidation of the church complex parcels under a consistent Commercial 1 Zone to enable more coordinated land use and development outcomes following consultation with relevant landowners. However, this support is conditional on future planning controls ensuring (i) protection of heritage values, with built form outcomes that respond sensitively to the site's cultural and architectural significance, (ii) clear master planning requirements embedded in the Built Form Overlay to guide development and ensure it delivers net community benefit, including public realm improvements, active frontages and appropriate transitions to surrounding residential areas.

## St Georges Road core

St Georges Road functions as a lower-order activity centre supporting local retail and services. However, fragmented development, underperforming commercial areas and a traffic-heavy environment have limited its appeal and commercial viability. Inconsistent active frontages and poor pedestrian amenity further constrain its potential as a vibrant mixed-use corridor.

### Unlocking mixed-use potential

Larger sites along the corridor present opportunities for mixed-use development. To realise this potential, planning controls should safeguard against residential dominance, which could undermine the employment function of the centre. Redevelopment incentives should prioritise, active ground-floor commercial uses, tenancies suitable for small businesses, upper-floor intensification for offices and housing and enhance public interfaces and pedestrian-friendly design.

### Rezoning in St Georges Road core

Given the underperformance of existing commercial land and uncertainty around future demand, Council supports a rezoning of Residential Growth Zone land between Woolton and Fyffe Streets to strengthen the commercial core. This should be supported by economic studies strategically justifying this rezoning and considering potential amenity impacts to residents.

Applying the Mixed Use Zone (MUZ) would enable a balanced mix of residential and commercial uses, support smoother transitions to adjacent residential areas, and avoid Windfall Gains Tax liabilities for residents. This approach aligns with St Georges Road's role as a lower-order activity centre complementing the High Street centre.

## Key asks

- ➔ Ensure new developments maintain active, fine-grain ground-floor commercial tenancies and mixed uses that support retail, hospitality, creative industries, and small businesses, sustaining High Street's vibrant street character.

- Reinforce key commercial nodes (key gateways) within the High-street centre, including Croxton, Thornbury Central, and Thornbury Village as focal points for street activation, urban design and wayfinding.
- Ensure ground-floor activation and mixed-use development in strategically viable locations along St Georges Road, enhancing these areas with improved public realm and pedestrian-friendly interfaces while safeguarding against residential dominance to protect employment functions.
- Provide a public benefit uplift framework for large sites that includes strategic land uses to encourage adaptable spaces for creative, affordable and cultural enterprises.
- Support rezoning of appropriate residential land along St Georges Road core to Mixed Use Zone, expanding commercial floorspace to serve a growing population and creating a more viable, successful activity centre.
- Support fine grain ground floor tenancies along High Street to support retention and provision of affordable, adaptable spaces for small businesses, independent creatives, and cultural enterprises to reinforce opportunities for offices, co-working, and economic activity, and supporting small business diversity.
- Implement high-quality design standards for forecourts encompassing landscaping and architectural detailing to support place-making, pedestrian comfort, and visual continuity along mixed use and commercial precincts.
- Support rezoning of the St Mary's Roman Catholic Church complex supported by clear master planning and built form controls that ensures heritage values, cultural significance, and consistent zoning to achieve consistent mixed use outcomes.

# Transport and sustainable mobility

## High Street

High Street is a lively and well-connected corridor, supported by tram Route 86 and nearby rail services. It attracts high pedestrian volumes and features a strong street activation, particularly around Croxton, Thornbury Village and Thornbury Central. These areas are well suited to transit-oriented development that promotes walking and cycling, reduces car dependence and may allow for reduced parking requirements.

Despite these opportunities, High Street faces several challenges. Parking pressures and safety concerns for cyclists affect comfort and accessibility. Several tram stops are not accessible, and pedestrian crossings, especially for east–west movement, are limited. This often leads people to use quieter backstreets for safer travel.

The corridor's arterial road character, marked by wide traffic lanes and minimal landscaping, detracts from walkability and limits opportunities for greening. Vehicle crossovers and on-street parking further encroach on pedestrian space, reducing street vibrancy and amenity.

To address these issues, reallocating road space is essential. Upgrades to Route 86 should include tram stops that meet Disability Discrimination Act standards and improved pedestrian crossings[3]. Dedicated infrastructure for east–west movement, supported by traffic calming, will enhance safety

[3] *Destination High Street, see Route 86 advocacy*

and access. Encouraging rear lane access for vehicles can help protect pedestrian zones by reducing crossovers.

High Street's wide road reserve presents a valuable opportunity to introduce broader footpaths, landscaping and tree planting. These improvements would enhance the pedestrian experience and support active transport. Better integration of walking routes with tram stops and other public transport nodes would strengthen connectivity. A continuous north–south pedestrian path would improve movement along the corridor, while shaded rest areas between High Street and St Georges Road can increase comfort for people walking.

## St Georges Road

St Georges Road functions primarily as a movement corridor, supported by tram Route 11, median-separated bike paths and adjacent green spaces. While it plays a strategic role in the transport network, it faces several safety and connectivity challenges. Wide road widths, unsafe pedestrian crossings and overlapping transit and cycling corridors create barriers to movement. Uncontrolled U-turns and car-prioritised traffic management further reduce safety, particularly at key intersections.

The corridor is designated as a north–south Strategic Cycling Corridor, but safe entry and exit points remain inadequate. Cyclists and pedestrians often face complex and hazardous interactions with tram and vehicle traffic, especially when accessing streets such as Miller Street. In commercial areas, narrow footpaths restrict activation and limit opportunities for active frontages.

Targeted improvements are needed to support safer and more accessible movement. Footpaths should be widened, and crossing safety and visibility improved, particularly at intersections such as Normanby Avenue. Front setbacks can provide more space for pedestrians, canopy planting and outdoor trading, enhancing walkability and local character.

## Network enhancement for connectivity

Improving transport connections in and around activity centres means prioritising modes that reduce reliance on private vehicles while promoting public health outcomes by encouraging physical activity and enhancing wellbeing. A shift towards walking, cycling and public transport can help ease congestion, reduce noise and improve safety, while also protecting the amenity of surrounding neighbourhoods. When parking management is coordinated with built form controls, it can support higher-density development along tram and train corridors and further encourage active travel.

### Walking networks

Walking is central to sustainable mobility, linking people to shops, services and public transport in Thornbury and nearby centres. To support future growth, key corridors, particularly St Georges Road, should be upgraded with wider footpaths, safer crossings and universal access improvements.

High Street should be reimagined as pedestrian-friendly spaces through landscaping, shade trees, seating, lighting and clear wayfinding. Large opportunity sites should also include mid-block pedestrian and cycling links to improve permeability and strengthen east–west connections. Many of these crossings have been developed by State Government as part of the Tram Route 86 upgrade project.

Existing walking routes between St Georges Road, High Street and train stations, especially Miller and Hutton Streets, need targeted upgrades. Reducing vehicle crossovers on key pedestrian paths and using laneways for servicing will improve safety and street vibrancy. Optimising traffic signals, greening corridors and improving night-time visibility will further encourage walking. Safe and

accessible pedestrian links between St Georges Road, High Street and nearby train stations are critical to improving overall connectivity.

### Cycling networks

Cycling plays a useful role in supporting environmental and public health goals, but it depends on safe and connected infrastructure. Key intersections such as St Georges Road at Merri Parade and Miller Street require upgrades to address risks posed by crossings with car focused designs. Routes should be direct and convenient, with continued investment in Oakover Road and Darebin Road, and formal recognition of emerging paths like the rail corridor "shimmy" and Hutton Street. Protected and extended laneways can reduce vehicle crossovers, support servicing and activate street frontages[4].

To make cycling more inclusive, infrastructure should accommodate a range of bike types, including longer and non-standard designs. End-of-trip facilities and secure bicycle parking will support broader uptake. All routes should be designed using the safe system principles to suit riders of varying confidence levels, especially where routes are shared with freight or general traffic.

### Bus networks

Bus services currently offer limited frequency and east–west coverage. Improving connections beyond Bell Street and Normanby Avenue is essential, along with upgrades to stops that improve accessibility and comfort. Introducing bus priority lanes should be considered to enhance reliability and make public transport the most attractive choice for more people. Addressing first and last mile gaps, particularly around stations and tram stops, will help integrate bus services with walking and cycling networks.

### Tram networks

Tram Route 86 is the backbone of public transport in the area, but it needs extended planning and investment. Upgrading Route 86 stops to meet Disability Discrimination Act standards, along with improving service frequency and reliability, will reinforce the tram's role as a sustainable and accessible transport choice. Changes within the activity centre and beyond should be considered.

### Freight and general traffic

Freight and general traffic on roads such as Darebin Road, High Street and Normanby Avenue often conflict with cycling routes and high pedestrian areas, creates safety risks. Measures such as lane narrowing, speed reductions and potential 30 km/h zones will improve safety and amenity. Park-and-ride facilities located outside activity centres can help reduce congestion. Managing parking on-street will continue to be a function of Council to support safety and access to the activity centres.

Explore feasibility of level crossing separations within the Thornbury Cluster to improve traffic and movement.

## Key asks

- ➔ Improve east-west public and active transport connections between the St Georges Road and High Street centres by delivering dedicated walking and cycling corridors that connect to key transit routes supported by measures for traffic calming and reducing vehicle crossovers.

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[4] *Several strategies are relevant, see Darebin Safe Travel Strategy 2018-2028, Darebin Transport Strategy, Walking Strategy 2018 – 2028, Advocacy Strategy 2022-26 and Streets for People*

- Upgrade Route 86 tram stops to be fully DDA compliant, while implementing tram priority measures, increased service frequency and reliability and safer pedestrian crossings to improve accessibility and support efficient public transport movement.
- Protect and invest in key cycling corridors and infrastructure, formally recognising High Street as a multi-modal corridor that serves both transport and place functions including provision of infrastructure that support a variety of bike types.
- Engage communities on safety improvements at unsignalised crossings on St Georges Road tramway median to improve safety and efficiency for all users, including cyclists, trams and vehicles.
- Introduce wider ground-floor setbacks on St Georges Road core for footpath widening and greening within the core to provide wider footpaths and space for canopy planting, improving the pedestrian environment and comfort.
- Support and embed mid-block active transport connections within large development sites to improve permeability and support active travel. Support pedestrian connection through sites that are large and have limited sensitivities.
- Widen footpaths, enhance crossings, and ensure universal access in public realm improvements to accommodate increased pedestrian activity.
- Include ground floor rear setbacks where existing laneways stop mid-block to extend laneway networks for improved vehicle servicing, pedestrian movement, servicing, and supporting main street activation.
- Minimise vehicle crossovers on main streets by prioritising laneways and side streets for vehicle access to minimise conflicts on busy streets and to enhance vibrant, walkable streetscapes.
- Secure State funding for public transport improvements to the tram and bus networks, including priority transport projects to ensure timely delivery and network resilience.
- Modernise car parking and bike parking standards to support sustainable mobility goals while supporting the delivery of EV infrastructure.
- Strengthen pedestrian links between High Street, St Georges Road and train stations, prioritising Miller and Hutton Streets.
- Improve pedestrian comfort through widened footpaths, increased landscaping, shade tree planting, and provision of seating and street furniture.
- Integrate walking routes with tram stops and bus interchanges to support seamless multimodal travel.
- Establish shaded pedestrian pause points between activity centres to encourage walking and improve comfort.
- Upgrade safety at key cycling intersections and unsignalised crossings, particularly along St Georges Road and Merri Parade.
- Formalise and invest in emerging cycling routes, including the rail corridor shimmy path and Hutton Street.
- Ensure cycling infrastructure considers the safe system design principles and accommodates riders of all skill levels while supporting non-standard bicycle designs.
- Review freight and general traffic routes to minimise conflicts with cycling infrastructure and high pedestrian areas and implement measures like lane narrowing, speed reductions to improve safety where needed.
- Expand east–west bus routes beyond Bell Street and Normanby Avenue and increase service frequency and coverage.
- Upgrade bus stops to enhance accessibility, comfort and safety.
- Consider bus priority lanes to improve reliability and encourage mode shift.

- Considering moving park-and-ride facilities near Mernda rail to locations outside activity centre to reduce local traffic and parking pressure and return land as landscaped parkland.
- Implement traffic calming measures, including lane narrowing and 30 km/h zones.
- Consider the highest and best use of community land within the activity centres to create the spaces of the future where residents will want to visit, connect with each other and support their local traders.

# Environmental sustainability and climate resilience

## Strengthening green networks in new developments

High Street currently has limited canopy cover and fragmented green spaces. While Penders Park and All Nations Park provide open space, these are poorly connected to the activity centre. In contrast, the St Georges Road corridor benefits from a continuous landscaped median along the Melbourne Water reserve.

New developments in core areas should reinforce Darebin's green infrastructure by embedding greenery within higher-density precincts. Incorporating canopy trees, landscaped setbacks and well-designed open spaces supports biodiversity and improves water retention.

Redevelopment sites offer opportunities to encourage passive solar design, deep soil planting and solar access protection. Streetscape upgrades incorporating rain gardens and Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) within widened footpaths, alongside street tree planting, will improve biodiversity, increase urban canopy, reduce heat stress and bolster resilience.

## Commitment to climate action and broader sustainability measures

### Darebin's climate emergency and emission reduction goals

Darebin declared a climate emergency in 2016, joining a global movement. The Council recently endorsed the Climate Emergency Plan 2024–30[5], setting ambitious emission reduction targets through 2027 and beyond. This Plan prioritises protecting vulnerable residents from heatwaves, flooding, and fuel poverty, while promoting urban greening, stormwater management, and expanding tree canopy to reduce heat stress and improve liveability.

Environmentally responsive design requirements should go beyond making room for trees and plants to mandate stable indoor temperatures for year-round comfort, where apartments are designed as heatwave refuges, and where new development use every opportunity to integrate alternative energy and water sources alongside urban greening.

### Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) frameworks and gaps

Darebin, as a member of the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) and supporter of the *Elevating ESD Targets* initiative, highlights the urgent need for rigorous sustainability frameworks to guide new developments. These frameworks should reduce environmental impacts, improve occupant wellbeing, and enhance water and material efficiency. The implementation of performance-based sustainability criteria through the Victorian ESD Roadmap Stage 2 can ensure certainty in delivering sustainable, high-quality built environments.

[5] *See: Your Say: Climate Emergency Plan, 2024-30*

Recent advances such as the mandatory seven-star ratings under the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) have improved thermal performance and reduced energy demand requirements in new buildings. However, these standards mainly focus on building envelopes and do not adequately address critical resilience elements including year-round thermal comfort, heatwave refuge capacity, embodied carbon, passive design principles, or the selection of low-carbon construction materials.

This gap is especially significant for higher-density centres like High Street and St Georges Road, where residents are likely to be increasingly vulnerable to heat risks and climate impacts. Factors such as roof colour influencing cooling costs and the carbon footprint of building materials remain insufficiently considered. Moreover, current standards largely overlook circular economy principles, including material reuse and end-of-life planning, which are essential to reducing long-term environmental impact. Addressing these gaps is crucial to creating climate-resilient, sustainable urban centres.

## Embedding sustainability in planning controls and development

Proposed standards should ensure that new developments achieve net-zero carbon emissions aligned with Council's climate goals through early-stage, mandatory Environmentally Sustainable Design assessments for all development types.

Current sustainability frameworks should be reinforced through the adoption of rigorous, performance-based criteria and quantitative sustainability modelling tools such as Built Environment Sustainability Scorecard (BESS), Green Star, Blue Factor/STORM to ensure adaptive and resilient urban environments. Comprehensive Sustainability Management Plans should mandate quantitative modelling, benchmarking and monitoring using these established tools.

### Improving daylight access, internal amenity and light courts

Building setbacks should differentiate between sensitive internal spaces, such as living rooms and bedrooms, and less sensitive areas. This ensures equitable daylight and outlook opportunities for primary living spaces. Consistent with the BESS tool, setbacks should correspond to building heights and the orientation or outlook of living spaces.

Light court minimum dimensions should be determined using the extensive daylight modelling approaches detailed in BESS. The size of light courts should correspond to the scale of the development, for example aligned to building heights in both core and catchment areas. Crucially, detailed daylight modelling reports assessing living and bedroom areas across multi-residential developments should accompany planning applications to accurately quantify daylight quality. These outputs should include daylight factors and meet sustainability rating credits.

## Permeability, stormwater and greening

### Stormwater management and deep soil planting

Deep soil and permeable areas play a key role in stormwater management, reducing urban heat island effects, and enhancing greening. With Melbourne's stormwater network nearing capacity, Darebin faces increasing pressure to retain and manage water on-site in accordance with the EPA General Environmental Duty 2017, which holds Council and developers responsible for stormwater management.

If lower-scale apartments under the State's Future Homes program are required to provide meaningful landscaping, the same principle should apply to higher-intensity developments in activity centres.  Deep soil planting of at least 15% should be mandated for all developments on sites 1,000sqm and larger.

Council supports the measurable tree canopy and greening targets in the Built Form Overlay. Where lower landscaping requirements are permitted for new developments on smaller lots, they should be balanced by standards requiring roof landscaping and green walls to enhance urban greenery, amenity, and sustainability.

## Integrated water management

The State's intention to embed water-sensitive city outcomes within planning and funding is positive but inadequately considers local infrastructure constraints, maintenance demands, funding shortages, and enforcement challenges for voluntary integrated water management policies. Equitable water sensitive outcomes depend on well-funded upgrades and maintenance of State and local infrastructure, underpinned by clear mandatory planning controls and enforceable Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) requirements.

WSUD controls should be embedded in proposed planning controls for new developments. This should be supported by dedicated funding, maintenance resources, and enforcement powers to ensure reliable delivery of integrated water management outcomes in the public realm.

## Flood mapping, hazards and urban intensification

Melbourne Water's recent flood mapping identifies land that is subject to a 1% Annual Exceedance Probability flood event in the year 2100 with climate change. It classifies flood hazard based on water depth and flow speed.

The Thornbury Cluster area includes the Melbourne Water Preston Main Drain, which forms an important component of the regional drainage infrastructure, as such extensive parts of Bracken Avenue, west of St Georges Road and some smaller areas east and south of High Street face moderate to high flood risks

As part of the new flood modelling, Melbourne Water has developed detailed hazard information that provides more insight into different levels of flood risk. As illustrated in Figure 8, the flood extent across parts of the catchment is significant, with hazard classifications ranging from H1 to H3. The hazard approach aims to avoid new development in high risk areas, and the strategic planning approach should be reconsidered in higher hazard categories (e.g. Bracken Avenue area). New planning controls associated with these new hazards are currently being prepared by Melbourne Water and these controls will be formalised through a future planning scheme amendment in 2026.



*Figure 8 Map showing indicative areas potentially affected by flooding hazards based on recent Melbourne Water modelling in Thornbury area (top), Melbourne Water flood hazard levels to the west of St Georges Road (bottom)*

## Key asks

- ➔ Exclude higher-risk flood prone areas from the Housing Choice and Transport Zone catchment where possible (as shown in Council's proposed catchment area changes in Figure 6).

- Implement clear, enforceable minimum Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) standards uniformly in planning controls to ensure sustainability is addressed at the earliest development stages.
- Establish and enforce minimum targets for tree canopy and permeable surfaces within the Built Form Overlay to mitigate urban heat island effects and support biodiversity, including protections for mature trees.
- Implement planning provisions that require new developments to incorporate comprehensive Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) measures, ensuring effective management of stormwater to mitigate climate risks such as flooding and to enhance urban sustainability.
- Integrate WSUD features and high-quality landscaping into streetscape upgrades to achieve climate-resilient, green urban centres.
- Set clear and enforceable minimum Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) standards to embed sustainability early in development process.
- Establish minimum targets for tree canopy and permeable surfaces within built form controls to reduce heat island effects and support biodiversity. Protect mature trees.
- Mandate deep soil planting for sites above a minimum size. Exempt only small lots. Support canopy growth, cooling and stormwater management.
- Broaden climate-responsive design principles to include stable year-round indoor temperatures, heatwave refuges and integration of alternative energy and water systems alongside greening.
- Replace standard Sustainable Design Assessments with Sustainability Management Plans that require robust modelling and benchmarking using recognised tools.
- Set mandatory daylight modelling requirements for multi-residential developments to ensure good internal amenity. Use measurable daylight performance indicators.
- Include comprehensive Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) measures in new developments and streetscape upgrades. Secure dedicated funding and enforce compliance.

# Infrastructure contributions and value capture

High Street and St Georges Road corridors present significant potential for coordinated infrastructure delivery to support ongoing housing growth. As commercial cores and their catchments intensify, contributions toward streetscape, footpath, lighting, bicycle parking, and laneway improvements will be critical to keep pace with growth. Delivery of public realm improvements, including street trees, lighting, furniture, and pedestrian facilities, through Council's capital works require adequate funding from state and transport agencies for tram and bus stop upgrades.

## Financial context and infrastructure renewal

### Funding pressures and flexibility

Council faces significant financial pressure in renewing and expanding ageing community facilities to meet increasing demand in a rate-capped environment. Infrastructure Contributions Plans (ICPs) should capture development uplift value while maintaining or increasing funding allocated to councils relative to existing benchmarks. ICPs should be flexible to accommodate site-specific constraints, emerging infrastructure needs, demographic changes, and asset renewal for long-term benefit.

### Importance of coordination and consultation

Successful infrastructure delivery depends on early and ongoing consultation with councils and communities to ensure alignment with local priorities, capital works programmes, and asset management strategies. When well-coordinated and supported by equitable, adaptable funding mechanisms, these efforts can effectively sustain liveable, connected, and resilient communities amid population growth.

## Development constraints and opportunities for value capture

High Street faces challenges from ageing infrastructure, compounded by constraints such as environmental audit and heritage overlays that limit developable floor space, ultimately reducing the infrastructure levy revenue potential.

### Value capture for additional public benefit

Larger and corner sites, especially on High Street and strategic sites on St Georges Road, provide opportunity for value capture through floor area uplifts in exchange for public benefits such as public open spaces, transport upgrades, and affordable housing. The Built Form Overlay (BFO) provision should enable negotiated agreements to support additional off-site improvements such as lane widening and pedestrian link enhancements as part of development application processes on large and strategic sites.

## Public realm improvements

The High Street and St Georges Road are key corridors connecting commercial and residential areas, with the Route 86 and 11 Tram Corridors providing public transport connections. However, narrow footpaths, inconsistent pedestrian facilities and a focus on movement over place function continue to limit safe, comfortable access and reduce the vibrancy of public spaces.

### Measures to support growth and activation

Growth of the centres should therefore be matched with streetscape upgrades such as widened footpaths, continuous awnings for shelter, quality street furniture and improved lighting. Transport projects such as the Route 86 upgrade should be complemented by public realm improvements to activate street life and encourage walking and cycling like those outlined in Darebin's *Destination High Street advocacy*[6]. Together, these measures will create safer, more inviting spaces that support pedestrian activity and local businesses.

### Funding and investment needs

In the current rate-capped environment, coordinated federal and state funding and investment are critical to enable effective place-making and improve civic infrastructure. Such funding will enhance public spaces and streetscapes, enhance the economic vitality of the centres and supporting their ongoing growth. Council welcomes opportunities for state and federal funding to support the planning, piloting, and delivery of place-making initiatives that will help realise this vision.

## Open space provision

Open space in the centres is fragmented and unevenly distributed. Each catchment contains a range of parks and reserves that provide valuable recreational opportunities. For example, High

[6] *Destination High Street, see Route 86 advocacy*

Street catchment features Penders Park and All Nations Park, while St Georges Road includes Batman, Henderson parks and the Merri Creek parklands.

However, larger parks are mostly located on the edges of these catchments, leaving inner areas with small, dispersed parks that may struggle to meet the growing demand from planned housing developments. Additionally, the lack of well-connected green corridors along key east-west routes limits access and movement between these spaces.

### Strategies for growth and connectivity

To address this, expanding and creating new green spaces through potential land acquisition, road closures, and integrating open space within major developments should be considered. Increasing tree canopy and green infrastructure will provide cooling shade, enhance environmental quality, and better connect parks to encourage walking, outdoor activities, and social interaction.

Sustained funding through higher open space levies and State Government support can support the delivery of *Plan for Victoria* target of 30% tree canopy cover within the public realm and open spaces (excluding areas reserved for biodiversity or native vegetation conservation).

## Community infrastructure

Darebin's community infrastructure, which includes cultural venues, sports facilities and community centres, plays a crucial role in promoting social inclusion and wellbeing. Council is currently undertaking community infrastructure planning to identify the municipality's needs and assess whether existing council-owned facilities remain fit for purpose. Preliminary analysis indicates that many of these facilities now face capacity constraints and require upgrades to remain fit-for-purpose, accessible and safe for all users.

As the Centre grows, community infrastructure improvements should be synchronised with housing development to prevent strain on existing services and to ensure growth is accompanied by investment in community facilities. Funding these upgrades will better equip the Centres to meet the needs of its expanding community, ensuring a vibrant and well-supported environment for residents.

## Key asks

- Introduce development contributions through Infrastructure Contributions Plans for the activity centres to support delivery of new infrastructure to meet the needs of the growing community, enabling communities to maintain liveability, connectivity, and access to essential services.
- Engage councils early and meaningfully in the development of Infrastructure Contribution Plans (ICPs) to align funding mechanisms with local infrastructure priorities, delivery capacity, and asset management strategies.
- Protect local funding streams by ensuring new state infrastructure levies do not reduce or dilute councils' ability to deliver critical local infrastructure.
- Consult the community on new Infrastructure Contribution Plans to reflect local needs and support well-planned, equitable infrastructure outcomes.
- Design Infrastructure Contribution Plans with flexibility on delivery to accommodate site-specific constraints, emerging infrastructure requirements, demographic changes, and asset renewal.
- Use value capture tools for large redevelopment sites to share the value of higher yields with the public on benefits like upgraded public realm, transport, social infrastructure and affordable housing.
- Incorporate a higher public open space contribution in the centres to support the growth and secure state funding to expand and maintain parks, green links, and public realm improvements that support growing communities.

- ➔ Prioritise equitable sharing of development uplift value with local communities through enhanced open space levies and infrastructure contributions that respond to provision gaps and quality deficits.
- ➔ Develop ICP mechanisms that are simple, equitable, and fit-for-purpose, supporting responsive and timely infrastructure delivery as growth and community needs evolve.
- ➔ Commit state funding to upgrade transport and community infrastructure to ensure they meet the needs created by housing growth.
- ➔ Integrate Route 86 tram stop upgrades with expanded public realm improvements in between the stops to maximise benefits from transport and streetscape investments.

# Community engagement and governance

## Independent, transparent and inclusive engagement

### Community participation in planning

A successful planning process for High Street and St Georges Road requires commitment to independent, transparent and inclusive community engagement. Detailed plans should be developed in close consultation with residents to ensure their views and concerns meaningfully shape future growth.

The drafting of planning controls, including defining catchment boundaries for Housing Choice and Transport Zones should be informed by community input. Early and ongoing community involvement will help balance development outcomes with neighbourhood character objective and support a shared understanding.

### Evidence-based and accessible decision-making

Final planning provisions and activity centre plans should be grounded in transparent, publicly accessible evidence. Clear information about site-specific factors such as lot size, access, and physical constraints ensures decisions are well informed and trusted by the community.

### Monitoring and accountability

Robust evaluation and monitoring frameworks should be implemented to track the impact of planning reforms and enable ongoing adjustments to enhance outcomes and responsiveness.

## Collaborative partnerships and industry engagement

### Transparency and collaborative planning

There is currently inadequate transparency regarding the modelling and methodologies that underpin decisions about building heights, catchment boundaries, and activity centre typologies. The lack of coordinated interface and built form transition guidelines risks fragmented and inconsistent planning outcomes.

### Consider impediments to construction to achieve housing supply

The rezoning of land does not address all impediments to housing supply. The state should consider the capacity of and barriers within the development market to deliver viable new housing.

There are examples of site within Darebin, including these parts of Thornbury, which have approved planning permits that are not being acted upon. The development pipeline is still slow to convert

these into actual housing supply. This delay highlights a disconnect between planning intent and market feasibility.

Broader economic factors, such as construction costs, interest rates, taxation, and labour availability, are limiting the feasibility of new housing, particularly affordable and diverse formats.

Current market conditions have created a significant gap between what it costs to build and what buyers can afford skewing outcomes toward luxury apartments, undermining the goal of inclusive, mixed-use neighbourhoods.

Without targeted intervention by state and federal governments into broader construction issues, the Activity Centre Program risks producing delayed, fragmented or exclusive outcomes that do not reflect community needs or planning objectives.

### Key asks

- ➔ Commit to independent, transparent and meaningful engagement with the Council and community on detailed plans, ensuring diverse voices are heard and integrated.
- ➔ Implement robust evaluation and monitoring frameworks to assess the effectiveness of planning reforms and support accountability.
- ➔ Allow submissions to be heard at an independent planning panel ahead of gazettal of new planning controls for the centres.
- ➔ Use the government levers to address construction sector feasibility challenges that extend beyond planning reforms such as mew codes and development controls.

## Conclusion

Council strongly supports the State Government's commitment to addressing the housing crisis, improving public transport, and investing in activity centres that are well served by sustainable transport options. High Street and St Georges Road are uniquely placed to help meet these goals, each offering a distinctive blend of accessibility, community character, cultural vibrancy, and green assets.

As housing growth continues, guiding change with community input can help support fair, sustainable, and balanced outcomes for the Thornbury Cluster. With clear housing targets, strong design standards and sustainable infrastructure planning, High Street and St Georges Road can grow into vibrant centres that offer more homes, better public spaces and stronger local economies.

Darebin is committed to working closely with the Victorian Government to shape planning frameworks that support inclusive, well-designed and resilient neighbourhoods. A shared approach will be essential to ensure these centres continue to grow in ways that reflect local character, meet community needs and deliver lasting public value.