



**Darebin  
Economic  
Framework**

*'Where the economy thrives  
and wealth stays in the Darebin  
community'*



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 the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have lived on this land for millennia, practicing their customs and ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. Council acknowledges that Elders past and present 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.



# OPENING HOURS

Monday - Saturday

7am - 4pm

Sunday

8am - 4pm



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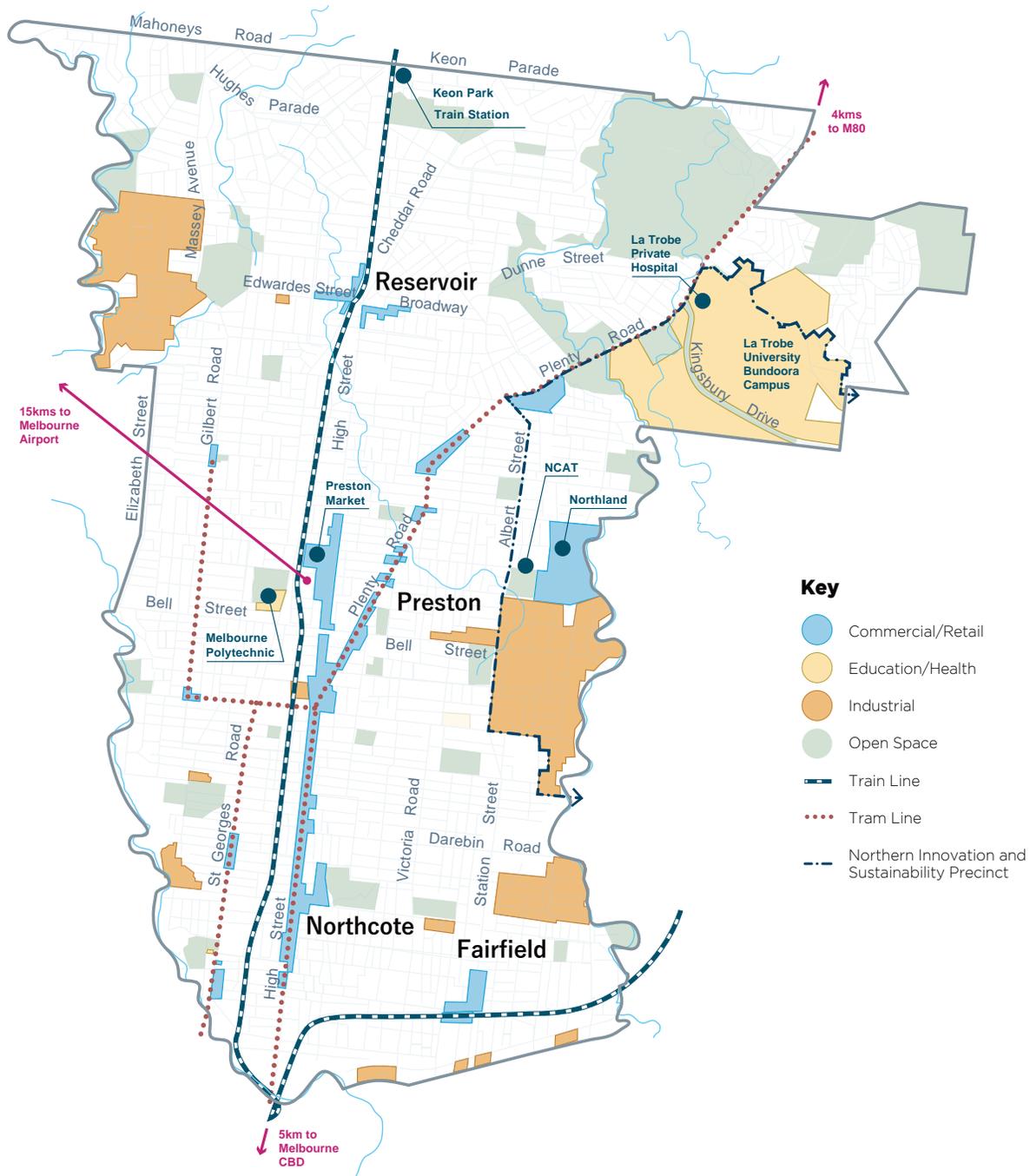
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# Introduction

## Purpose of the Framework

At Darebin, we understand how economic, environmental and social drivers both enable and constrain economic growth and job creation within our community. The current cost of living pressures have highlighted the need for adaptable and resilient economic strategies.

Our Economic Framework (Framework) provides a guide for how Council works with its businesses, industry, and partners to build a cohesive and clear economic direction for Darebin. It aims to leverage Darebin’s strengths, such as its vibrant arts and media sector, strong educational institutions, and diverse workforce, to grow health, job opportunities, and overall prosperity.



## Research and consultation approach

A comprehensive research and consultation approach was undertaken to develop the Framework. Between October 2023 and July 2024, a series of consultations with local businesses and economic stakeholders were conducted. This involved engaging with 327 businesses and stakeholders through round tables, summits, and workshops, resulting in 961 individual comments and 1162 votes on those comments.

The consultation process also included 405 minutes of guest presentations, 450 minutes of networking, and 1,020 minutes of group discussion, covering 15 different industries. To ensure the Framework is grounded in best practices and evidence-based development, an extensive review of case studies was conducted.

This review identified successful strategies and innovative approaches, providing valuable insights and benchmarks for Darebin.

Local knowledge and experience were carefully examined alongside these case studies to tailor the framework to Darebin's unique context. Data analysis played a crucial role in shaping the Framework. Statistical data was analysed to identify trends, opportunities, and challenges within the Darebin economy.

This evidence-based approach ensures that the Framework is not only responsive to current economic conditions but also strategically positioned to anticipate and address future changes. The integration of robust data analysis underscores the importance of making informed decisions and crafting economic development plans that are backed by evidence, enhancing the Framework's effectiveness and relevance. The commitment to a rigorous, data-driven development process reflects Council's dedication to ensuring a resilient and prosperous economic environment in Darebin.



## Engagement contributions



**327**

businesses and stakeholders came to a round table summit or workshop



**972**

individual comments gathered



**1,162**

votes were cast on comments



**405**

minutes of guest presentations



**450**

minutes of networking



**1020**

minutes of group discussion



**15**

industries represented



**179**

people completed a business survey



**26**

people completed a community survey



**8**

Council departments were engaged

**Why Darebin?**

A diverse,  
multicultural  
community  
passionate about  
great food!



**Why Darebin?**

A business community that prioritises hiring locals.



## Role of Council in economic development

Local government operates in a complex economic environment. We serve as both major employers and catalysts for job creation within our communities.

As significant consumers and purchasers of goods and services, we also play a vital role in stimulating local economies.

However, our ability to influence broader economic outcomes is often constrained by external factors and Council's key revenue base is rate capped.

Our Framework therefore positions Council in differing roles depending upon local economic needs and resource capability.

Council's role	Description
Advocate	Advocate for our business and wider community on economic reform, including industry, business, place, sustainability, and social issues.
Capacity builder	Facilitate and support businesses, employers, and employees with capacity-building training.
Communicator	Share knowledge and information to improve economic, business, and place outcomes and partnerships.
Connector	Connect Darebin's communities together and to the wider regions to drive and strengthen partnerships and investment.
Action leader	Make impactful and/or sustainable change by successfully delivering on agreed actions in an efficient manner.
Partner	Work in collaboration with internal and external partners to provide value to each other and strategic outcomes for Darebin.
Placemaker	Enhance the physical and social fabric of our community spaces to foster thriving business environments and retail precincts.
Planner	Strategically plan to optimise land-use to support industry, business growth, and employment, and encourage business size diversification.
Regulator	Support and work with business to attract and efficiently process regulatory applications and solve compliance issues.
Referrer	Direct businesses to appropriate stakeholders and levels of government for information, grants, and support to help their business grow.

## Place-led approach

By adopting a place-led approach, we ensure that economic development strategies are tailored to the specific needs and strengths of each community within Darebin. This involves close collaboration with local businesses, residents, and other stakeholders to create vibrant, resilient, and prosperous neighbourhoods. Council acts as a vital referrer, guiding businesses to relevant stakeholders and higher levels of government for additional resources and support, to enhance their growth and sustainability.

## Economic development within a climate emergency

Darebin City Council was the first government in the world to declare a Climate Emergency in response to community calls in 2016. Local businesses play a crucial role in addressing climate change as they are responsible for around half of our greenhouse gas emissions and are also highly vulnerable to its impacts.

However, disruption brings opportunity. Darebin offers significant growth prospects for businesses in clean tech and sustainable food tech, which can leverage the local community's passion, expertise, and commitment to climate action. The transition to electrification and a circular economy presents numerous opportunities and benefits, including lower operating costs, enhanced resilience, and new avenues for business growth.

The Framework highlights these opportunities and encourages businesses that prioritise social and environmental responsibility to establish themselves in Darebin. By fostering a supportive environment for clean tech and sustainable food tech, we aim to attract businesses that align with our community values and contribute to a sustainable future.

This strategic focus on climate adaptation and the green economy ensures that Darebin not only addresses the challenges of climate change but also capitalises on the economic benefits of becoming a hub for sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship.





**Why Darebin?**  
It's home to a dynamic social enterprise sector.

# Darebin's economic profile

Darebin's economic landscape is anchored by its resilient manufacturing sector, despite national trends, remaining a major export earner and provider of local jobs. The health and social assistance sectors are trending for significant growth, supported by major educational providers like La Trobe University and Melbourne Polytechnic, who supply skilled professionals to meet increasing industry demands. Darebin is becoming a hub for green technology and sustainable practices, attracting businesses committed to environmental sustainability. We have a diverse, multicultural and creative community that contributes a wide array of skills and innovative ideas, to make for a dynamic business environment.

## Local business summary

	<b>155,683</b>	Population
	<b>\$8.44</b>	Billion Gross Regional Product
	<b>13,988</b>	Locally registered businesses
	<b>98%</b>	Small businesses (<\$10 million turnover, 70% micro/sole trader)
	<b>17</b>	Businesses with 200+ employees
	<b>250</b>	Businesses with a turnover over \$10 million
	<b>61,681</b>	Local jobs

## Top 3 employing industries

	<b>2,152</b>	Construction (30% with 1-4 employees)
	<b>1,983</b>	Professional, scientific and technical (92% with 1-4 employees)
	<b>1,462</b>	Rental, real estate and hiring

## Youth employment

	<b>13.9%</b>	Youth unemployment (compares to 13.8% for Victoria)
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Source: Economic profile | Darebin | economy.id

## Comparative advantage by industry

### Expanding sectors with a traditional strength (Top 3)

-  **1** Education and Training
-  **2** Retail Trade
-  **3** Healthcare and Social Assistance

### Emerging sectors (Top 3)

-  **1** Construction
-  **2** Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
-  **3** Transport, Postal and Warehousing

### Declining Industries with a traditional strength

-  **1** Manufacturing

### Declining industries without comparative advantage (Top 3)

-  **1** Financial and Insurance Services
-  **2** Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
-  **3** Wholesale Trade

Source: SGS Economics and Planning (2024) using data from ABS Census 2016 and 2021 – Place of work data.

While manufacturing has declined in Darebin, it still plays a vital role in the Darebin economy. Manufacturing is Darebin's largest export earner and remains a key employment industry. Health and social assistance are projected to show the greatest growth over the next decade.

## Local economic drivers

### Top 5 resident local expenditure categories in Darebin (April 2024)

-  **1** Grocery Stores and Supermarkets  
\$21,659,477
-  **2** Dining and Entertainment  
\$19,482,679
-  **3** Specialised Food Retailing  
\$11,677,610
-  **4** Specialised and Luxury Goods  
\$10,374,824
-  **5** Transport  
\$9,670,532

### Top exports from the Darebin Economy, 2022/23

-  **1** Manufacturing  
\$858,600,000
-  **2** Education and Training  
\$675,800,000
-  **3** Healthcare and Social Assistance  
\$378,600,000
-  **4** Wholesale Trade  
\$304,400,000
-  **5** Retail Trade  
\$282,900,000

Source: SGS Economics and Planning (2024) using Spendmap data by Geografia. Note: Only top 5 spending categories are included.

# Economic vision for the future

**'Where the economy thrives and wealth stays in the Darebin community.'**

Darebin is an economy where local independent business prospers, providing a catalyst for job growth within our community. An interconnected and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem is perfectly positioned for growth, enhancing the livelihoods of our residents and reinforcing the local economy.

Strengthened supply chains ensure the benefits of our economic progress – wealth, jobs, and talent - remain within Darebin, helping more residents live out their career dreams without the commute.

Darebin's sustainability commitments are nationally recognised with our manufacturing sector leading transition towards a net-zero, climate-resilient economy. Our reputation as a sustainable and innovative business hub continues to attract investments in circular economy initiatives.

People feel connected, welcomed and proud to call Darebin their home. Darebin's thriving main streets are celebrated as among the 'coolest High Streets' globally. Vibrant street culture, live music, art and a unique Darebin 'vibe' are an integral part of our local identity. Cultural dining destinations, markets and community events draw visitors back time and again.

The Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct (NISP) is an economic powerhouse driving education, health and research innovation. La Trobe University is a thriving city of the future, driving advancement in education, health, and research while connecting communities within a vibrant urban precinct. La Trobe Private Hospital is surrounded by a thriving cluster of health professionals and entrepreneurs. Local talent and supply chains have bolstered Darebin's health and education sector and reinforcing our vision of a thriving, job-rich local economy.

## Why Darebin?

A community that supports local independent business.





# Framework pillars

**Empowering Darebin's economy for sustainable growth**

**Collaborative mainstreet revitalisation**



**Mobilising health and education for community wealth**

**Activating enterprise clusters for growth**



**Why Darebin?**  
The dining destinations are outstanding!

*Local residents strongly support independent businesses, many of which choose to expand within Darebin.*



# Empowering Darebin's economy for sustainable growth



## Strategic goal

Enable partnerships that support businesses of all scales for sustainable growth and workforce equity.

### Strengths

- A strong small businesses sector.
- A professionally oriented workforce.
- A diverse, multicultural community.
- Sustainability values including the Net-Zero Business Program and Climate Emergency Plan.

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Businesses are under pressure, feeling increasingly isolated and are seeking connection with local supply chains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a Darebin Economic Futures Network</li> </ul>	Action leader	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect businesses for peer-to-peer support and localise supply chains</li> </ul>	Connector	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote industry champions / achievements and grant opportunities provided by third parties</li> </ul>	Communicator	# Participants % Growth business connection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate business peer-to-peer mentoring to help small businesses to learn, grow and scale</li> </ul>	Connector	# Businesses # Industries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partner with local providers to provide assistance to small businesses and entrepreneurs – e.g. start-up support, business planning</li> </ul>	Partner	# Partnerships secured
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Celebrate local climate and circular economy business champions to foster peer to peer inspiration and learning.</li> </ul>	Communicator	



Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Building stronger resilience is required, with 98% of businesses being small and 65% being micro/sole traders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate creating a local networking group to foster opportunities for collaboration between businesses, to grow a resilient ecosystem</li> </ul>	Partner	# Participants # Businesses
Only a small base of businesses have over 200 employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish partnerships with major employers, including education and health service providers, to investigate a CEO-to-CEO network</li> </ul>	Connector	# Partnerships secured
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with major employers and industry providers to plan for local workforce development and job pathways for young people, people with disabilities, CALD and First Nations communities to build an inclusive workforce</li> </ul>	Partner	

# Collaborative mainstreet revitalisation



## Strategic goal

Collaborate for social and economic revitalisation and grow local partnerships through place-led activities.

### Strengths

- A network of distinct retail and commercial centres and strips.
- Places and destinations for visitors such as High Street, Northcote. Preston Market. Northland as key retail hub for inner north-east.

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Consumer and business confidence trending down. Activity centre customers not local, only 15-20% of visitors are from Darebin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboratively develop shared place visions that amplify unique strengths, activate local communities and drive social and economic revitalisation</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Participants % Social connection (met someone new)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revive shop local campaigns to increase local visitation and reduce economic leakage</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Business partnerships # Landlord partnerships
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop annual place measurement framework and place satisfaction survey to track impact of initiatives</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Annual report and place satisfaction survey
Online spend still a challenge to bricks and mortar. Foot traffic declining.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower local communities and grow locally-led activation skills and culture</li> </ul>	Capacity builder	# Participants # Businesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide placemaking and activation grants</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Grant funded projects % Local pride
Youth unemployment high – 13.9%.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish regular local activation calendar</li> <li>• Enhance youth civic agency by building capability in community development, event organisation and public space activation</li> </ul>	Capacity builder	# Participants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnering with youth service providers and social enterprises to deliver initiatives led by young people with long-term inclusive employment outcomes</li> </ul>	Capacity builder	# Partnerships secured

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Streetscape upgrade scheduled for High Street, Preston, causing major disruptions impacting businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of Business Support Plan to ensure trade continues during the works, minimising economic impacts</li> </ul>	Action leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Participants</li> <li># Business partnerships</li> <li>% Local Pride</li> </ul>



**Why Darebin?**  
Preston is central.  
Our work is all  
over Melbourne.



# Mobilising health and education for community wealth



## Strategic goal

Mobilise partnerships, clusters and localised supply chains to grow community wealth.

### Strengths

- A growing health and education sector.
- Designated Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct in Bundoora.
- A highly skilled and multilingual population and workforce.
- A range of key anchor institutions - La Trobe University, La Trobe Hospital, Melbourne Polytechnic.
- Establish clusters within NorthLink including Melbourne's North Food Group and Melbourne's North Advanced Manufacturing Group

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Darebin's key growth industries are not well supported by allied clusters of local supply chains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, promote and grow local allied clusters to strengthen localised supply chains in proximity with health providers</li> </ul>	Action leader	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of allied health network groups to strengthen localised supply chains</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Participants % Business connection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grow relationships and partner with hospitals, education providers and other major employers to grow inclusive employment and wellbeing outcomes for young people and vulnerable communities</li> </ul>	Partner	# Business partnerships
Only 22% of Darebin residents work in Darebin. Local employees with specialised skills are hard to find, especially in the north.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with strategic partners to develop initiatives for the Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct</li> </ul>	Partner	# Partners
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support better transport connection between education providers, health providers and other major employers</li> </ul>	Partner	\$ Funding # Grant funded projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract talent and skilled workforce within the Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct</li> </ul>	Partner	

# Activating enterprise clusters for growth



## Strategic goal

Activate clusters, support transition and plan for optimised land use for long term prosperity.

### Strengths

- A strong and resilient manufacturing sector.
- Large areas of industrial land.
- High value manufacturing activities.
- A highly educated local workforce.

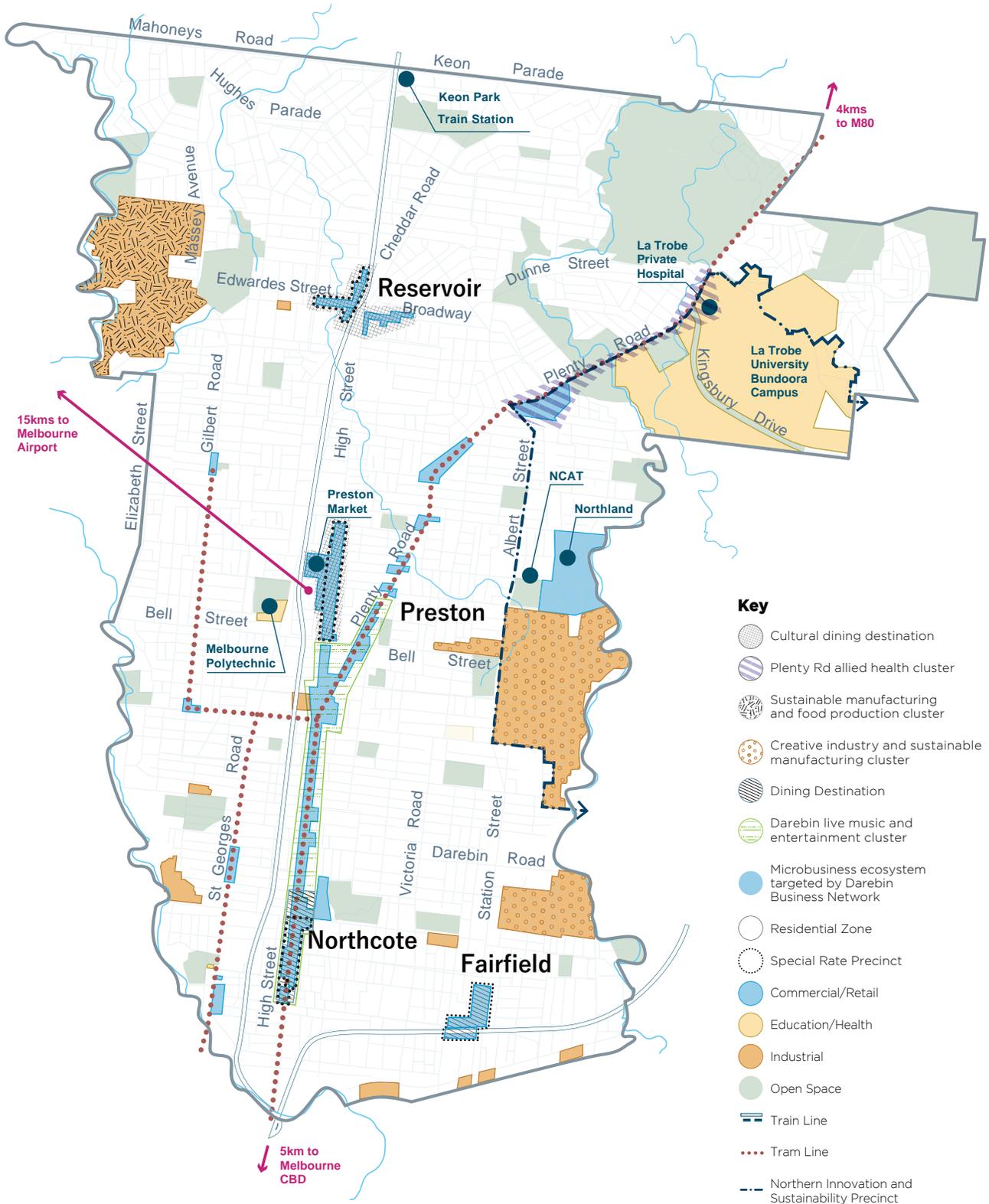
Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Darebin's manufacturing sector is declining as industries transition to areas with larger lot sizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate current and potential industrial zoning to attract new business and investment</li> </ul>	Action leader	# New businesses # Business participants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with a third party to support small and medium sized business to be climate resilient and plan to manage risks with business transition to a net-zero economy</li> </ul>	Partner	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with the growing creative manufacturing sector in Preston and Thornbury and link to local startups and social enterprises</li> </ul>	Connector	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for funding to support increased training opportunities, including free TAFE programs and workforce training, for local residents to take up job opportunities in the zero-carbon economy</li> </ul>	Advocate	



Source: Semiconductor Media

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Land use not optimised for local employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake an economic land use study to inform planning settings which respond to strategic strengths, support economic development and long term employment growth</li> </ul>	Action leader	Measures to be defined
Emergent enterprise clusters undefined. Darebin's unique identity and strengths under-capitalised on and opportunities are lost.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify, promote and grow Darebin's iconic live music cluster to strengthen the ecosystem and attract new business and investment</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Partners \$ Funding # Grant funded projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with business associations to promote and grow Darebin's iconic dining destinations to attract visitation and new business investment</li> </ul>	Partner	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attracting last mile distribution, food and beverage and other large employers to Darebin</li> </ul>	Advocate	

# Economic opportunity



## Lighthouse projects

### Empowering Darebin's economy for sustainable growth



Partner with local businesses, social enterprises and not for profits to establish a Darebin Economic Futures Network that supports networking, enables small business to participate in economic partnerships and learn, grow and scale-up

Explore establishment of a CEO-to-CEO Network to facilitate partnerships with major Darebin employers

Research the feasibility of establishing a B2B program for Darebin Businesses to purchase from local suppliers

### Collaborative mainstreet revitalisation



Develop Shared Place Visions for each activity centre and a Business Support Plan for the High Street Streetscape Upgrade to guide collaborative social & economic revitalisation and reconnect local customers with activity centres

Review and revitalise Darebin's award-winning Active Spaces program to proactively address shopfront vacancy rates

Partnering with service providers and social enterprises to deliver capacity building and skills training initiatives led by young people to achieve inclusive employment outcomes

### Mobilising health and education for community wealth



Define the Plenty Road allied health cluster around La Trobe Hospital and develop vision and investment attraction prospectus

Partner with La Trobe University, Banyule Council and NorthLink to develop the Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct (NISP) to drive social, economic and sustainability outcomes in the North

### Activating enterprise clusters for growth



Municipal Economic Land Use Study to understand the future needs and opportunities to optimise land use for job creation

Deliver a program to support small and medium businesses to become more resilient and transition to a net-zero economy

Identify, define and promote existing informal clusters:

- Sustainable manufacturing & food production clusters in the Reservoir Industrial Precinct
- Live music cluster in Thornbury and Croxton



**Why Darebin?**  
There's support for  
creating change in  
the community.



# The lifecycle of the Framework

The Framework is intended to guide future priorities, projects, programs and partnerships of Council to develop Darebin's economy. Council will continue to listen to the community, businesses, and our stakeholders to ensure that we are responsive and relevant throughout the lifecycle of the Framework. This lifecycle will involve consultation, program design, action plan delivery and implementation and evaluation to develop regular action plans from the Framework.

Each action plan from the Framework will be preceded by an interim Evaluation Report, bringing together updated consultation outcomes, new data analysis, feedback and measurements to invest into the next action plan.

## Annual survey

- An annual business survey will be conducted with local businesses and stakeholders to provide an understanding of key challenges, opportunities and identify emerging trends across Darebin's economy.

## Design

- Every action will have process, performance, outcome and impact evaluation measures built into its design

## Delivery

- Following endorsement of the Economic Framework by Council a rolling Economic Action Plan will inform annual actions for delivery
- Our businesses and partners working with Council on actions will be provided opportunities to engage with their customers and stakeholders to cultivate a feedback loop

## Evaluation

- Participant and recipient feedback, new research and statistical analysis will be used to identify changes, trends, and innovation

## Acknowledgements

The development of this Framework was supported through the contributions of hundreds of businesses and economic partners in and near Darebin through participation in workshops, completing surveys, sharing their experiences, and reflecting on the materials gathered. Thank you for your contribution. Council looks forward to the many partnerships and projects to be created to realise this Framework's objectives.

## Further reading

If you would like to find out more about the various pieces of information gathered through research and consultation that contributed towards this Framework, please follow this link to information on the [Darebin City Council Website](#).

Please contact the Economic Development Unit at Darebin City Council for more information by phone **(03) 8470 8344** or email **[business@darebin.vic.gov.au](mailto:business@darebin.vic.gov.au)**.



*Our vibrant street culture, featuring live music, art, and cultural events, is an integral part of local community identity.*



Source: Lucy Lucy (Lucy Desbordes)

## CITY OF DAREBIN

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