FINAL REPORT

Darebin Neighbourhood Character Study

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Acknowledgments

Foreword

The City of Darebin commissioned Planisphere to undertake a review of their 1998 Urban Character Study in June 2005.

Since its adoption, the Urban Character Study has been an essential reference in the assessment of permit applications in residential areas. However, the municipality has seen significant changes to in recent years and the Study was in need of revision to reflect this.

The Neighbourhood Character Study has provided updated documentation of Darebin's residential areas, which were surveyed in detail and their character described through words, maps and photographs. The community workshops and Community Committee meetings were a vital means of exploring the values placed upon Darebin's character by those who live or work in the municipality.

An important outcome of the Study is the recognition that there is a great diversity of neighbourhood character throughout the City, and that this is one of the most distinctive and valued qualities of Darebin's residential areas. Neighbourhoods range from traditional low density and low scale suburban areas to more compact inner urban areas with heritage streets or contemporary apartment dwellings. All eras of the City's history and evolution are represented in its buildings and streetscapes.

The Neighbourhood Character Study has been undertaken in parallel with the Housing Distribution Strategy, which has influenced the study's outcomes and recommendations. Establishing the most effective method to manage demand for new housing in the municipality, while retaining the valued character of its residential areas, is of increasing importance to both Council and the community.

The recommendations of this Study will ultimately strengthen the policies and planning controls necessary to ensure that those aspects of neighbourhood character that are highly valued will be retained and enhanced for the future. At the same time, the Study also includes strategies for providing new housing and managing resultant change in the municipality.

The success of the Neighbourhood Character Study will require collective understanding and concerted action by the Council, local community, developers and other agencies. We present this Neighbourhood Character Study as the vehicle for initiating protection, maintenance and enhancement of Neighbourhood Character within the City of Darebin.

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Planisphere

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1. Brief and Method

1.1   Brief

The brief for the proposal included several broad objectives:

- To review and update the 1998 Urban Character Study.

- To co-ordinate the Neighbourhood Character Study with the development of Council's housing strategy.

- Engage the community at each stage of the project to understand what they value about the City's character and how it could be improved in the future.

- To identify areas of valued neighbourhood character that are to be retained and enhanced.

- To identify areas where change has occurred and to update precinct descriptions and guidelines accordingly. Existing precinct boundaries were checked and modified as required.

- To identify where change could be accommodated and a range of new housing provided, and to develop guidelines as to how this can be achieved with minimal impact upon existing valued neighbourhood character.

- To provide recommendations on the range of statutory tools available to manage issues of neighbourhood character and to strengthen policies and controls in the planning scheme accordingly. In particular, this includes the use of the Neighbourhood Character Overlay and Residential 3 Zone for areas of a high level of consistency in their character and building scale.

- To recommend other implementation options that include promotion, education, training and the role of Council in the management of neighbourhood character.

The City of Darebin

The City of Darebin is located approximately 4 kilometres from central Melbourne. It is generally bounded by the Merri and Darebin Creeks to the west and east respectively, Heidelberg Road to the south and Mahoney's Road/Keon Parade to the north. It covers an area of approximately 53 square kilometres.

Bell Street, which is located in the centre of Darebin, forms a geographic and demographic edge between the city's inner southern area and its northern section. The character of the City's residential areas show a marked difference between these two broad areas.

Council's Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) highlights the importance of the City's diverse housing profile, stating that "this diversity needs to be retained to meet the varied needs of the community". The MSS also emphasises the value of the City's urban character and heritage, stating that new development should be "sensitive and responsive to the heritage and urban character of Darebin".

The Study Area

The Neighbourhood Character Study relates to land within the Residential 1 and Mixed Use zones of the municipality. It excludes the two Structure Planning areas of Northcote and Preston, as well as the Junction Area (High

Street and Plenty Road, Preston), as these projects are either completed or underway and address neighbourhood character issues relating to residential areas within their study boundaries. The Structure plan area of Reservoir has been included in the Study as this project has not yet commenced.

Neighbourhoods within Heritage Overlay areas have been included in the study, as they were in the 1998 Study. While these areas may ultimately be excluded from the policy or controls that result from this study, it is important to have included them in the survey to allow comparison between heritage areas and all other neighbourhoods.

Darebin Neighbourhood Character Study, 1998

The first Darebin Neighbourhood Character Study was completed in 1998 by Mike Scott and Associates, with the assistance of Lisa Riddle Planning Services (who have subsequently formed Planisphere).

The study method included two surveys – a broad framework survey in which the eight different character area types were identified, and a detailed street-by-street survey to determine individual precincts. Extensive community consultation was also conducted, both of a general nature and targeted focus group sessions.

Brochures were produced for each precinct and these are used by the Council during assessment of all residential planning applications. The brochures include detailed descriptions of existing character, a brief preferred character statement and illustrated design guidelines. The brochures also include guidelines for heritage sites and are used as supplementary material in the assessment of heritage applications.

1.2   Methodology

The Neighbourhood Character Study 2007 was conducted in three stages and proceeded through a simple sequence of tasks. The methodology was based on the objectives and requirements of the project brief and was elaborated in discussion with the Council.

Each stage of the project included broad community consultation. Meetings and discussions were held throughout the project with the project Steering Committee, which comprised the study team and Council officers.

The project commenced with a review of the 1998 Neighbourhood Character Study, followed by a detailed survey to determine the level of change that has occurred within each precinct as necessary. Guidelines for managing future development within each precinct were prepared and the project concluded with recommendations for changes to the Darebin Planning Scheme.

The Study dovetails with work undertaken by the Council in preparation for the Regional Housing Statement and Council's Housing Distribution Strategy. Discussion with the Department of Sustainability and Environment has reinforced the need to undertake the Neighbourhood Character Study in such a way that it achieves the dual outcomes of managing change within residential areas and delivering on Regional Housing Statement / M2030 housing aspirations.

The findings of this study are therefore integrated with the delineation of housing policy areas that provide for 'minimal change', 'incremental change' and 'substantial change'. Different approaches to character are needed in each of these areas and the study reflects this.

The approach to neighbourhood character identification in this Study followed and confirmed the principles applied to the 1998 Study. That is, the existence of eight broad Character Area Types identified across the municipality, providing the framework for the identification of 41 individual neighbourhood character precincts.

The study methodology is summarised in the diagram at the end of this section.

Stage 1

Preliminaries

At the commencement of Stage 1, the study team confirmed Council's requirements, established the detailed timelines and approach for the study and commenced background research. Detailed consultation methodology for the project was also set out.

A desktop review of the 1998 Study and other relevant local policies was conducted. Discussion with Council planners informed the study team of known and emerging significant changes in urban character.

Council provided the boundaries of the residential areas that are excluded from the Study as they have been the subject of other planning or design studies. This relates to the Northcote and Preston structure plan areas, the High Street Urban Design Framework and the Darebin Junction area. The residential areas around the Reservoir Activity Centre were included in the Study as it will be some time before its structure plan is complete.

Council also requested that several strategic redevelopment sites be included in the Study, so that additional design guidance could be prepared.

Staff Workshop

A workshop was held with Council building and planning staff to understand how the Neighbourhood Character Study is currently used, and ways that it could be improved. This provided invaluable information from the key users of the Study.

Community Consultation

In Stage 1, the community consultation program was confirmed with the Steering Committee and commenced with the circulation of the first Community Bulletin and a series of ads in the local paper. Three Community Workshops were held, the disposable camera exercise conducted and the Community Committee established.

Consultation is further discussed in section 1.3.

Staff Workshop

A workshop was held with the Council planning and building staff to discuss the recommendations of the study and outline the differences in approach between the previous and new guidelines.

Stage 2:

Study of the 1998 Study and detailed survey

In the next stage of the project the 1998 Study was reviewed in detail. This task involved:

- Street-by-street survey of all residential areas. The purpose of this survey was to check the existing information for each precinct and note any changes to character that had occurred since 1998. (This survey was not as extensive as the detailed survey conducted for the original study as it was to review existing information).

- Assessment of the eight Character Area Types (A-G) identified in the 1998 Study to confirm or revise as required.

- Assessment of all current precinct boundaries and documentation of character of each precinct to confirm the information in the 1998 Study or revise as required.

- Surveying of strategic redevelopment sites.

- Identification of areas/elements warranting particular protection (for example by overlay controls in the planning scheme).

The Study focused on elements of the environment that may be incorporated into preferred future character-related planning controls, such as building height, site coverage or significant landscapes.

More information about the survey can be found in section 4.2 of the report.

Precinct Identification and Issues Papers

Following the community consultation of Stage 1 and the detailed survey, precinct boundaries were refined as required and an Issues Paper was prepared for each precinct for discussion at the second Community Committee meeting. The Precinct Issues Papers describe the existing characteristics of each precinct, particular issues and the values of the community. They set the scene for the drafting of detailed design guidelines and implementation considerations. All of the Precinct Issues Papers are included in Appendix 5. The method of preparing the papers is detailed in section 5.1.

Stage 3:

Design Guidelines and Precinct Brochures

During Stage 3 draft design guidelines specific to each precinct were prepared. These provide objectives and appropriate design responses for new residential development, including alterations or renovations visible from the street. The guidelines were prepared for discussion at the third Community Committee meeting.

At the end of Stage 3 draft Precinct Brochures were prepared for each precinct. These brochures contain all the relevant information for each precinct extracted from the Precinct Issues Papers and the design guidelines. The information is presented in a clear, easy to read format, with photographs, a map and illustrations. More information about the brochures is included in section 5.

Implementation Recommendations

Recommendations for the statutory implementation of the Study have been developed in consultation with the Steering Committee, and where relevant, the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Options that required careful consideration include implementation through local policy, overlays or changes to ResCode Standards. These are detailed in section 6.

We have also broadly addressed non-statutory mechanisms such as education and encouragement and, importantly, public realm works such as footpath treatments and street planting usually carried out by the Council.

Monitoring and review of the Neighbourhood Character Study is also a part of the recommendations.

1.3 Communication and Consultation

A communication and consultation strategy was developed with the Steering Committee at the start of the study process. This focussed on three elements: communication, participation and consultation. It aimed to provide genuine opportunities for involvement and achieve wide ownership of the resulting recommendations.

The aim of *communication* was to inform a wide audience about the existence of the study, its progress, and opportunities for involvement. The purpose of *participation* was to involve a necessarily small group in helping to shape the content of the study as it emerged. *Consultation* provided an opportunity for broad public comment on the study and input into the issues that it should have addressed. We therefore conducted an approach that:

- announced the commencement of the study through public advertisements and a Community Bulletin;

- included three community meetings in different locations that were open to all of the Darebin community;

- established a Community Committee to oversee the process, with membership comprising Council's project manager, a Councillor and community representatives from across Darebin (see below); and

- provided an opportunity for general community comment on the outcomes of the project.

Communication also included informing the community on issues relating to housing via the Community Bulletins and displays at the Workshops.

The various forums and outcomes of the communication and consultation are summarised and included as Appendices. The implications of the key issues raised are discussed in sections 4, 5 and 6.

Communication Strategy

Mailing List

A mailing list was assembled by Council to facilitate distribution of the Bulletin and other purposes. This included people who registered their interest in the study, as well as community and industry groups previously known to the Council.

Community Bulletins and Notices

Three editions of a Community Bulletin were produced, one in each stage of the study (refer Appendix 1). These provided the main vehicle for informing the wider community about the existence of the study, its purpose, its approach, and its findings. The first Bulletin introduced the study and invited people to the Community Workshops. The second Bulletin provided an update on the progress of the Study and the third publicised the availability of the draft final report and brochures. These were sent out to interested parties on the mailing list and were available in libraries and Council offices.

Notices in the local papers were also used to inform a broader audience of the commencement of the project and to advertise the Community Workshops.

Participation Strategy

Community Workshops

The Community Workshops were an important information gathering exercise in the first stage of the study. They were attended by approximately 50 participants. The workshops assisted in exploring answers to those questions about neighborhood character that formed the basis of the principles for each precinct, as well as gaining an understanding of broader cultural and social issues. A summary of the workshop outcomes are included as Appendix 2.

Specifically, the purpose of the workshops was to:

- provide an opportunity to announce the start of the project and explain its purpose;

- canvass the main issues of concern in the community about neighbourhood character;

- build confidence in the study;

- recruit members for the Community Committee; and

- commence the disposable cameras exercise.

Three Workshops were held:

Date	Location
Monday 21st November, 2005	Preston Shire Hall
Wednesday 23rd November. 2005	Reservoir Civic Centre
Wednesday 30th November, 2005	Northcote Uniting Church Hall

At these workshops, attendees were asked to consider three questions about their neighbourhood that are essential to the study:

> *What do you like about your neighbourhood? What things do you dislike or want to see improved?*

> *Where can change occur? What form should it take?*

These questions provided a basis for generating discussion about the Study , and they allow participants free range to suggest widely differing interpretations of character, including non-physical or social meanings.

While the Neighbourhood Character Study only addresses issues relating to the physical characteristics of each place which can be translated into planning scheme controls, the other issues raised at the workshops relating to social and community values, or issues such as traffic management, were documented for reference by Council in other capacities.

Disposable Camera Exercise

At the Workshops disposable cameras were distributed to community members who were asked to take photographs of developments they like and dislike, with locations and reasons given for each. The results were collated and selected responses presented to the first Community Committee meeting to generate discussion.

This technique was successful in engaging key members of the community in the study process and identifying community perceptions about their neighbourhood. It helped to focus attention on specific design issues, rather than generalised positions about medium density housing.

Community Committee

A Community Committee was established to provide the participatory focus for the study process. The Committee comprised a small number of people (eleven) who submitted nominations at the Workshops. The members were from the residential and development/designer communities and represented a range of interests and geographic areas of the municipality. One Councillor and Council officer were also included in the Committee.

The Committee meetings enabled the study team to engage in detail with community representatives who provided productive input to the study at each stage. The format of the meetings was as follows:

Meeting 1: Introduction to the process

- Results of Community Workshops and discussion of responses by each suburb.

- Photographs and captions from the disposable camera exercise.

- General discussion on residential design issues.

Meeting 2: Presentation of Precinct Issues Papers

- Presentation of photos boards for each of the eight character types of Darebin.

- Discussion on Precinct Issues Papers and Preferred Character Statements.

- General discussion on design issues and implementation options.

Meeting 3: Presentation of design guidelines

- Presentation of design guidelines for several precincts, including a mock-up version of the final brochure for comment.

- Further discussion on implementation options, including planning scheme provisions and educative/promotional initiatives.

Summary notes from the Community Committee meetings are included as Appendix 6.

Consultation Strategy

Community Bulletins

The Community Bulletins provided a means of allowing a broader audience to keep in touch with the project as it progressed. At the completion of the project, the final Bulletin invited feedback from the wider community on the Study's recommendations and the guidelines developed for each precinct, prior to Council exhibiting a Planning Scheme Amendment.

Darebin Festival

Council provided a display at the Darebin Festival, on Sunday 26th February. This was an opportunity for people to learn about the project and to view the photo boards showing the disposable camera exercise and the character types. Copies of the Bulletin were available and a questionnaire could be

filled out for people to offer their comments and values on neighbourhood character in their area.

1.4　　　Summary of changes to 1998 Study

The key changes to the 1998 Study are:

Precinct Mapping and Character Descriptions

- Character descriptions have been updated with current site survey information. Primarily this relates to infill development that has occurred since the 1998 Study. New landmarks also identified.

- Precinct boundaries have been updated as required. Generally, boundaries followed the existing precinct delineation, however, several new precincts in the northern parts of the municipality were created or boundaries adjusted to reflect changes that had occurred since the 1998 Study.

- Several small areas or individual sites which are zoned residential were omitted from the precincts delineated in the 1998 Study, and these were included in updated precincts as relevant.

- The descriptions of Character Area Types G and H have been amended to reflect development since 1998 Study.

- Areas subject to recent planning strategies that provide guidance on new built form have been removed: structure plan areas, High Street Urban Design Framework area and Darebin Junction.

Community Values

- Community Values have been updated through more recent consultation.

Preferred Character Statement

- The 'statement of desired future character' has been expanded to more accurately describe the preferred future character of the area.

- The 'statement of desired future character' of the 1998 Study is a list of neighbourhood character elements. This has been replaced with the updated 'preferred character statement' that is a descriptive paragraph illustrating how the various elements of neighbourhood character, in both the public and private realms, interact to create the distinct character of each precinct.

- The preferred character statement has been supplemented with 'this will be achieved by' statements that summarise the design parameters required to realise the preferred character. These statements then lead into the guidelines page which provides detailed information on each.

Design Guidelines

- Guidelines relating to setbacks and fences no longer contain numeric references, reflecting current statutory implementation requirements of DSE.

- Additional guidelines have been developed to address siting, height and building form issues in the Reservoir structure plan area, to allow higher density development that still responds to the preferred character of a precinct.

- New guidelines have been developed to address development issues in precincts that have a creek interface. In these areas, new development is encouraged to provide native vegetation, 'natural' looking materials and no or low/permeable front fencing.

- Guidelines are less prescriptive, particularly in terms of the duplication of the form of existing period buildings. The updated design guidelines generally encourage new dwellings to adopt the roof form of existing buildings, but allow more freedom in the use of materials and articulation of new development.

- The guidelines should provide greater direction for medium density housing design outcomes, as opposed to just single dwelling design outcomes.

Heritage and Neighbourhood Character Overlay areas

- The 1998 Study included several guidelines that specifically relate to Heritage Overlay areas. These have been removed so that the guidelines only relate to issues of neighbourhood character. It is recommended that the State heritage guidelines that are soon to be introduced are used for assessing heritage applications. Council's current heritage work may also see the heritage policy updated.

- Brochures for precincts with recommended NCO areas may include guidelines that relate to these areas.

- Recommendations have been made on potential NCO areas and heritage investigation areas that may require a greater level of statutory protection.

Relationship to Council's housing strategy

- Council's Housing Distribution Strategy has identified broad areas for minimal, incremental or substantial change and the recommendations of the Study have been co-ordinated with this work.

- Guidelines have been developed for Strategic Redevelopment Sites (SRSs).

- As noted above, recommendations have been made on potential NCO areas that warrant a greater level of protection and where only minimal change should occur.

Implementation

- Implementation recommendations reflect the changes in approach to housing and neighbourhood character since the 1998 Study, and the introduction of ResCode.

- A key consideration has been to ensure the guidelines do not duplicate existing ResCode requirements. The guidelines for each precinct have been redrafted to offer supplementary design guidance for each neighbourhood character element that is included in ResCode.

- The approach to implementation agreed with Council is to now include the Preferred Character Statement as a part of local policy, in addition to housing statements. In this way, the policy now addresses housing and neighbourhood character in a co-ordinated approach.

- Additional ideas for non-statutory implementation measures are offered, such as the promotion of the Study findings and raising public awareness of neighbourhood character issues.

Format

- The design of the precinct brochures has been updated with a new graphic image.

- Illustrations have also been updated and photographs included.

- All brochures and the report are in a downloadable format, as required for Planning Scheme Reference Documents.

1.5   Neighbourhood Character Study Process Diagram

| Preliminaries

Review of 1998 Study/ Policies | → | Survey | → | Confirm Character Areas and Precincts | → | Preparation of draft guidelines | → | Implementation & recommendations

Precinct Brochures |

OUTPUTS

| Survey notes and photos | → | Precinct Issues Papers | → | Precinct guidelines | → | Final Report and Precinct Brochures |

REPORT

| CHAPTER 2 | | SECTION 1&2 | | SECTION 4.2 | | SECTION 5.1 | | SECTION 5.2 | | CHAPTER 6 |

PARTICIPATION

| Steering Committee 1 and Interna Workshop | Steering Committee 2 Community Committee 1 | Steering Committee 3 Community Committee 2 | Steering Committee 4 Community Committee 3 | Steering Committee 5 |

| Disposable cameras | 'Likes' and 'Dislikes' | COMMUNITY VALUES |

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS X 3

COUNCIL

2. Policy Context

2.1   State Policies

State Planning Policy Framework

The State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) comprises a statement of general principles for land use and development planning, and specific policies dealing with sectoral issues. Planning and responsible authorities must take into account and give effect to both the general principles and the specific policies applicable to issues before them to ensure integrated decision-making.

Clause 12 *Metropolitan Development* has recently been included in the SPPF to give statutory effect to the Metropolitan Strategy Melbourne 2030 (discussed in the following pages). It comprises the key directions of Melbourne 2030 and objectives and strategies for each.

At Clause 12.01 *A more compact city*, the SPPF aims to concentrate new development in activity centres which have a range of functions and are well connected by public transport. Activity centres include business, shopping, leisure and community facilities and, importantly, provide different forms of housing. The SPPF aims to locate a substantial proportion of new housing in or close to activity centres or large redevelopment sites that offer good access to services and transport. Higher density housing with more compact dwelling types is encouraged in these locations.

Specifically, the SPPF seeks to:

- Encourage higher density housing development on sites that are well located in relation to activity centres and public transport.

- Ensure housing stock matches changing demand by widening housing choice, particularly in the middle and outer suburbs.

- Ensure planning for growth areas provides for a mix of housing types and higher housing densities around activity centres.

- Ensure an adequate supply of redevelopment opportunities within the established urban area to reduce the pressure for fringe development.

- Ensure all new development appropriately responds to its landscape, valued built form and cultural context.

At Clause 12.05 *A great place to be* the SPPF seeks to:

- Recognise and protect cultural identity, neighbourhood character and sense of place by:
  - Ensuring development responds and contributes to existing sense of place and cultural identity.
  - Ensuring development recognises distinctive urban forms and layout and their relationship to landscape and vegetation.
  - Ensuring development responds to its context and reinforces special characteristics of local environment and place by emphasising:
  - The underlying natural landscape character.
  - The heritage values and built form that reflect community identity.
  - The values, needs and aspirations of the community.

The SPPF encourages sustainable residential development in terms of waste and stormwater management and energy and water use at Clause 12.07 *A greener city.*

In Clause 13 *Settlement*, the SPPF states the following issue as being of relevance to neighbourhood character:

> Planning is to anticipate and respond to the needs of existing and future communities through provision of zoned and serviced land for housing, employment, recreation and open space, commercial and community facilities and infrastructure. Planning is to recognise the need for, and as far as practicable contribute towards:
> - Health and safety.
> - Diversity of choice.
> - Adaptation in response to changing technology.
> - Economic viability.
> - A high standard of urban design and amenity.
> - Energy efficiency.
> - Prevention of pollution to land, water and air.
> - Protection of environmentally sensitive areas and natural resources.
> - Accessibility.
> - Land use and transport integration.

Under the Settlement section, Clause 14.01 Planning for Urban Settlement, one of the objectives is:

> To facilitate the orderly development of urban areas.

At Clause 14.01-2 General Implementation the SPPF states that:

> In planning for urban growth, planning authorities should encourage consolidation of existing urban areas while respecting neighbourhood character.

Under the Housing section, the objectives in relation to medium density housing as outlined in Clause 16.02-1 are:

> To encourage the development of well-designed medium-density housing which:
> - Respects the neighbourhood character.
> - Improves housing choice.
> - Makes better use of existing infrastructure.
> - Improves energy efficiency of housing.

Clause 19.03 of the SPPF includes the following objectives in relation to Design and Built Form:

> To achieve high quality urban design and architecture that:
> - Reflects the particular characteristics, aspirations and cultural identity of the community.
> - Enhances liveability, diversity, amenity and safety of the public realm.
> - Promotes attractiveness of towns and cities within the broader strategic contexts.

Clause 19.03-2 General Implementation states that:

> Development should achieve architectural and urban design outcomes that contribute positively to local urban character and enhance the public realm while minimising detrimental impact on neighbouring properties.

Implications for the study

There is a clear emphasis in the SPPF and all other Victorian Planning Provisions (VPPs) upon the importance of neighbourhood character and contextual design, and the ResCode provisions introduced to planning schemes in 2002 reflect this. The pressing issues of maintaining the liveability of Melbourne's residential areas, ensuring the long term sustainability of the city and providing a greater range of housing options are also clear in the recent amendment to the SPPF.

The Neighbourhood Character Study has been undertaken in tandem with Council's Housing Distribution Study (discussed in the following section) to ensure that these planning objectives are balanced with the desire to protect the valued character of Darebin's established residential areas. The design guidelines prepared for each precinct aim to provide for a level of new housing provision that is suited to that particular area. The guidelines are also drafted to encourage a high quality of design in all new development and in the public realm, and to protect areas of significance, be it neighbourhood character, heritage or environmental.

Melbourne 2030

The metropolitan strategy, Melbourne 2030, sets out the strategic direction for the future growth and development of Melbourne over the next 25 years. It was released in October 2002 and incorporated into the State section of the planning scheme at Clause 12 in September 2005.

Of particular relevance to this study, Melbourne 2030 (at policy 5.2) describes neighbourhood character as:

"… an important component of sense of place and a key element of Rescode. Identifying and defining neighbourhood character is not about imposing design styles, but about recognising distinctive urban forms and layout and their relationship to landscape and vegetation. Rescode and other planning requirements will be used to ensure protection of existing valued urban and neighbourhood character."

Melbourne 2030 has identified three activity centres within the City of Darebin. Preston is classified as a Principal Activity Centre, while Reservoir and Northcote are both classified as Major Activity Centres.

Implications for the study

The major implication of Melbourne 2030 for the study is its emphasis upon the need to formulate policy to house the projected population of Melbourne. Each municipality is required, through the Regional Housing Working Group process and their Housing Strategy, to demonstrate where additional housing can be provided. Neighbourhood character and Rescode are, in theory, equally important directions of the study. However, it will be important for the Council to demonstrate to any planning panel and the Department of Sustainability and Environment, that any proposed neighbourhood character policy or controls do not conflict with the achievement of the housing objectives of the metropolitan strategy.

2.2   Council Policies

There are various sections of the Local Planning Policy Framework within the Darebin planning scheme which may impact upon the project. A description of each relevant section and its implications follows.

Municipal Strategic Statement

The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) sets the local policy context of the Darebin planning scheme. The MSS provides an environmental, social and economic profile of the City of Darebin and describes the state and regional context of the municipality. It is a concise statement of the key strategic planning, land use and development objectives for the municipality and the strategies and actions for achieving those objectives. The MSS provides the strategic basis for the application of the zones, overlays and particular provisions in the planning scheme and decision making by the Council.

The MSS Vision for the City of Darebin includes a strategic framework plan that sets the major directions for future land use and development. It identifies existing and future activity centres, potential redevelopment areas and places of biological significance and natural habitat, where development is generally constrained.

Clause 21.03 lists the Key Influences and Issues for the municipality and this includes Urban Character and Heritage. The need to update aspects of existing character and heritage studies and to ensure that appropriate planning tools are in place to manage these issues is recognised.

The Objectives-Strategies-Implementation section at Clause 21.05 of the MSS identifies Housing as one of the key elements of the City of Darebin, along with others including Urban Design, Activity Centres and Sustainability.

The most important element relating to this Study is Housing. Clause 21.05-2 sets out the context for housing issues throughout the municipality and provides a vision, with objectives and strategies to achieve the vision. Council's existing Integrated Housing Strategy (2002) identified key issues for the municipality which include housing for an ageing population and smaller household sizes, managing an increase in infill housing in established residential areas and accommodating a continued increase in demand for medium density housing.

A key issue for Darebin in meeting the Melbourne 2030 projections is to provide for additional housing in appropriate locations while ensuring that the valued character and heritage of existing neighbourhoods is retained. Clause 21.05-2 notes that parts of the High Street corridor have already been identified for future medium density housing in the High Street Urban Design Framework. It also provides a set of characteristics for sites where development of more than four storeys will generally be supported, such as sites that are large, close to public transport or an activity centre, located on main roads or offer a potentially high level of amenity for future residents. Those sites where higher scale development will not be supported include sites within heritage areas or the older neighbourhoods to the south of Separation Street, and those sites where a higher scale of building would create amenity impacts or disrupt key views.

Clause 21.02-5 includes strategies to encourage new development to respond to existing valued character and heritage, and the implementation of the recommendations of the Urban Character Study in the planning scheme.

Other MSS objectives and strategies of particular relevance to issues of neighbourhood character include:

- Clause 21.05-3, Urban Design, which encourages high quality design that responds to the characteristics of the locality, well maintained buildings and structures, attractive and safe public spaces and routes, and good urban design that contributes to sustainability outcomes. The implementation actions include an update and review of the Urban Character Study, 1998.

- Clause 21.05-4, Heritage, Culture and Arts, which, among other things, seeks to conserve and enhance historic places (such as buildings of a particular architectural period, including contemporary designs).

- Clause 21.05-6, Activity Centres, which provides objectives, strategies and implementation options to achieve the objectives of Melbourne 2030.

Implications for the study

The outcomes and recommendations of the Neighbourhood Character Study accord with the vision and direction of the MSS. The MSS contains and adequate 'umbrella' for implementation of neighbourhood character controls. Updating of references to the 1998 Study will be required.

Local Policies

The Darebin planning scheme contains a range of Local Policies related to residential development. Relevant to the Neighbourhood Character Study are:

- 22.03 Activity Centres Policy

- 22.04 Urban Character

- 22.05 Darebin Creek – Adjacent Land Design and Development

- 22.08 High Street Corridor Land Use and Urban Design

- 22.10 Residential and Mixed Use Development of Four or More Storeys

Activity Centres Policy

Darebin's Activity Centres Policy applies to all land within activity centres and implements the findings of the Retail Activity Centres Strategy (2005). In relation to residential land uses and neighbourhood character, the policy seeks to:

- Support the accommodation of non-retail uses such as residential or mixed use development in identified activity centres, where appropriate.

- Encourage a wide mix of activities including non-retail in Principal, Major and Neighbourhood Centres.

- Encourage integrated development, within activity centres.

- Ensure that development of new activity centres occur only in locations where a need has been identified to service new residential communities.

- Encourage innovative, high quality urban design responses which reflect and support the image, role and function of the centre in order to create a 'sense of place'.

Policy statements are provided for each type of centre within the activity centres hierarchy (Principal Activity Centres, Major Activity Centres, Neighbourhood Activity Centres, Local Convenience Centres and Bulky Goods/Homemaker Retailing Centres). In all activity centres, residential development is encouraged above or at the rear of retail uses. All development is also expected to address potential interface issues, particularly with surrounding sensitive land uses.

Implications for the study

Darebin contains one principal activity centre (Preston-Northland) and three major activity centres (Northcote, Preston-High Street, and Reservoir), as identified in

Melbourne 2030. Preston-Northland was originally excluded from the 1998 Study however the remainder of the Activity Centres were included in precincts. Given that there is sufficient policy addressing the Northcote and Preston-High Street Activity Centres, these will be excluded from the Study area. The Reservoir Activity Centre, however, will remain within the Study area.

Within the Reservoir Activity Centre and all neighbourhood activity centres (which are in some parts also included in the Study area), the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Character Study will be consistent with the Activity Centres Policy.

Urban Character

The existing Urban Character Policy applies to all residential development on land covered by the Urban Character Precinct Plan. The objectives of the policy are:

- To ensure that development complements and respects the urban character of the area.

- To retain and enhance the identified elements that contribute to the urban character of the area.

- To ensure that infill development within established areas is responsive to architectural and streetscape elements of the neighbourhood.

The policy addresses several character elements including design approach, position on site, height and form, vehicle access and storage and front boundary treatment. For each character element, a list of policy statements is provided to assist in the assessment of planning applications.

Implications for the study

The existing Urban Character Policy will need to be updated following this Study. The implementation recommendations of this Study will outline the changes that may be necessary to update the Urban Character Policy.

Darebin Creek – Adjacent Land Design and Development

The Darebin Creek Adjacent Land Design and Development Policy applies to properties located within a Darebin Creek Character Area (as shown on the map attached to Clause 22.05), and addresses issues related to the pressure for redevelopment along the creek and the development of industrial land and its impacts on the creek-side environs. The policy seeks to protect, maintain and enhance the natural, landscape, cultural and built elements of the creek. It also seeks to ensure that new development contributes to the desired character of the creek-side environs and does not adversely impact on the creek's aesthetic values.

Implications for the study

The brochures produced through the Neighbourhood Character Study touch on issues related to residential development along both the Darebin and Merri Creeks. Where a creek passes through a precinct, this is highlighted in the precinct description and preferred character statement, particularly where it contributes to the neighbourhood character of the area. For streets adjacent to the creek corridors, a special guideline has been developed to encourage buildings that complement the natural bushland qualities of the creek side environment.

High Street Corridor Land Use and Urban Design

This policy provides land use and urban design guidance for the High Street Corridor, between Creek Parade in the south and Wild Street in the north, and is based on the recommendations of the High Street Urban Design Framework and Precinct Guidelines. The corridor is broken up into 16 precincts, and for each precinct the policy provides a set of policy statements and design guidelines.

Implications for the study

The High Street Corridor UDF study area has been excluded from the Neighbourhood Character Study area due to the adequacy of existing controls within the policy area. Precincts identified during the 1998 Study that included properties within the UDF study area have been altered to exclude these properties.

Residential and Mixed Use Development of Four or More Storeys

This policy applies to residential development and mixed use development which includes a residential use, and is four or more storeys in height. The policy addresses several design elements related to sustainability, amenity and urban character issues. Those of particular relevance to this Study include design and materials, building heights, setbacks, and car parking and vehicle access. Each design element includes an objective and a set of design guidelines.

Implications for the study

Implementation recommendations resulting from this Study will need to be consistent with the Residential and Mixed Use Development of Four or More Storeys Policy.

2.3 Other Relevant Documents

The following Council policies and strategies provided useful background information for the current study and were also reviewed. Where relevant, the implications for this study are noted and discussed. Otherwise, it is considered that the findings of the study are consistent with the content of the documents, with no direct implications.

Local Studies, Policies and Strategies

The following regional studies, policies and strategies also provide useful contextual information for the character study review. Again, where the implications for this review are not discussed, it is accepted that the document is consistent with the findings and outputs of the review and will not conflict with its conclusions.

Darebin Integrated Housing Strategy

The City of Darebin is currently undertaking a Housing Strategy in order to fulfil the housing directions of Melbourne 2030. Based on projections from Melbourne 2030 and Victoria in Future, there is a need to accommodate approximately 8,700 more dwellings in Darebin up until the year 2030. Although it is not expected that the population of Darebin will increase substantially over the period 1986-2026, it is expected that the age structure will change quite dramatically, resulting in a greater demand for dwellings that can accommodate lone-person or couple-only households.

Current trends resulting from building approvals suggest that there are fewer applications for detached dwellings and a greater demand for medium density

housing. This trend is expected to continue due to the changing socio-demographic profile of the municipality as well as the lack of suitable land for additional detached housing.

Existing medium density housing is currently dispersed throughout the municipality; however, developments above five dwellings tend to be located along main roads.

Opportunities for future development exist within the City's activity centres, on redevelopment sites, along transport routes and spines, and within existing established neighbourhoods. Figures from preliminary work suggest that around 70 per cent of future residential development will be accommodated in activity centres, along transport routes or spines and on redevelopment sites, while 30 per cent will need to be accommodated within existing residential neighbourhoods.

Structure Plans for Darebin's activity centres have been, or are in the process of being produced in consultation with key stakeholders. The Structure Plans, for Preston, Northcote and Reservoir specify (or will specify) the location and quantity of residential dwellings to be accommodated within the activity centre. Potential strategic redevelopment sites in Darebin tend to result from the conversion of redundant industrial land and buildings throughout the municipality. As these sites tend to be larger, there is potential for significant yields of residential dwellings.

Implications for the Study

It is important that any implementation recommendations resulting from this Study do not diminish the ability of Darebin to meet its housing needs as set out by Melbourne 2030. This Study has found that Darebin's capacity to provide additional dwellings exceeds the current projections for dwellings necessary to accommodate future increases in population and changes in demographic structure. Therefore, the ability of Darebin to meet its housing needs will not need to be compromised by the protection of neighbourhood character in dispersed residential areas, and vice versa.

Current DSE advice is for Councils to establish areas within their municipalities that are suited to various levels of change and new housing provision. The terms 'minimal', 'incremental' and 'substantial' change are often used.

In this context, most of the housing growth in Darebin would be directed towards the substantial change areas around activity centres, along main roads and on Strategic Redevelopment Sites. Heritage and potential Neighbourhood Character Overlay areas would become the minimal change areas. All other residential areas would see incremental levels of growth.

In order for this Study to make recommendations on which areas can be effectively 'quarantined' as minimal change areas, it is essential that Council can demonstrate how the housing projections are to be met and where it is to be directed.

Heritage Investigations

Council have advised that they are conducting a heritage review of the entire municipality. This project will review the recommendations of existing heritage studies and examine areas to the north of the municipality for which heritage investigations have not yet been carried out. A thematic environmental history study will also be undertaken in order to understand the cultural aspects of the City's heritage. The project will take several years to complete and may result in additional Heritage Overlays.

Implications for the Study

This project has particular relevance to the Study in terms of identifying areas that may warrant inclusion in a Neighbourhood Character Overlay (NCO). Several areas have been recommended for consideration as NCOs, however an amendment to introduce this control should not take place until the heritage status of these areas has been determined.

Creek Studies

The Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 1998 was prepared by the Merri Creek Steering Committee, which comprised the five relevant Councils, the Friends Group and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. Council's MSS actions include updating the Strategy, preparing design and development guidelines for sites adjoining the Merri Creek and implementing these as a Local Policy as further strategic work required.

Implications for the Study

As noted, the brochures produced for the Study include reference to additional design considerations along the creek interfaces. The inclusion of a new Local Policy will assist in determining planning applications for sites in the vicinity of the creek.

Regional Studies, Policies and Strategies

Draft Northern Regional Housing Statement

The Draft Inner Regional Housing Statement aims to assist in planning for the needs of northern Melbourne regional households over the next 26 years. The population growth rate and the increasing number of households means that new housing opportunities that retain the character and liveability of Melbourne will be necessary. The statement provides a vision for the provision of future housing across the northern Melbourne region, discusses the opportunities and limitations of household provision and identifies strategies to address these.

The City of Darebin is one of six municipalities that the Northern Regional Housing Statement focuses on. The Statement predicts that there will be 8,644 new households within the Darebin study area accounting for 8.7% of growth in the northern region.

The document asserts that the northern region will be able to accommodate the projected population growth through the strategic location of new housing in greenfield locations on strategic redevelopment sites and in dispersed residential locations. The City of Darebin is one of two municipalities in the northern region identified as having no greenfield development opportunities. Instead, future residential development will be directed towards strategic redevelopment sites identified within structure plans, and in dispersed residential locations. A broad capacity analysis for Darebin's dispersed residential locations has shown that there is potential for approximately 2,700 new households.

Implications for the study

As with the Housing Strategy, it is important that any implementation recommendations resulting from this Study do not diminish the ability of Darebin to achieve household targets set out by both Melbourne 2030 and reinforced through the Northern Regional Housing Statement.

State-wide Studies, Policies and Strategies

The following state level studies provided further background information for the review.

Sense of Place: urban design principles for the metropolitan strategy, DSE/Planisphere, 2002

Suggests how sense of place can be better reflected in planning policies in the Metropolitan Strategy. Includes a description of landscape character types in Victoria, why that landscape is valued and outlines principles for development within the varying landscape character types. The report highlights that the underlying landscape character of an area is fundamental to its sense of place.

Guidelines for Higher Density Residential Development, DSE, 2004

These guidelines were developed to assist in the design of higher density residential development that will occur in selected locations, such as around activity centres and in proximity to transport routes. They provide detailed assistance in understanding the urban context of a development, the design of the building envelope in the streetscape context, considering how the building relates to street activity and in landscape design.

3. What is Neighbourhood Character?

3.1　　　　　Neighbourhood Character Defined

The concept of Neighbourhood Character, its components and its value has been widely discussed and debated over the last ten years in the planning of Melbourne's suburbs. It has been demonstrated well that neighbourhood character is something that can have a range of meanings for different people or situations and is difficult to define. In the neighbourhood character studies that Planisphere has undertaken, we have attempted to arrive at a definition of neighbourhood character to form the basis of our study methodology. This understanding of what constitutes neighbourhood character has been developed over the course of many studies and collaboration with local communities, Councils and DSE.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a clear understanding of Neighbourhood Character: what does it mean; how it is practically administered within the statutory framework; what are the principles of Neighbourhood Character; and what are Neighbourhood Character typologies?

What is Neighbourhood Character?

In December 2001 the former Department of Infrastructure published a General Practice Note titled 'Understanding Neighbourhood Character'. The Note contains useful information, however it fails to provide a single, all-encompassing and concise definition of neighbourhood character. Perhaps the most succinct definition is 'neighbourhood character is essentially the combination of the public and private realms'. The document suggests a number of factors as relevant, which to the reader may appear to obscure, rather than illuminate, the essence of neighbourhood character. Yet there have been useful previous statements on this subject, either auspiced by the former Department of Infrastructure, or produced by independent panels.

A more succinct and encompassing definition was included in the Draft Practice Note on Neighbourhood Character published in June 2000 as part of the first draft of ResCode:

> *Neighbourhood character is the interplay of natural, built social, cultural and economic conditions that make one place different from another.*

This definition is helpful, but it has a number of weaknesses:

- The focus does not remain on the meaning of neighbourhood character that is reflected in tools provided in the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPPs).

- The adjective 'qualitative' is excluded when using the term 'interplay'.

- The reference to 'combination of the public and private realms', which is in the current Practice Note, is not included.

It is true that people attribute widely differing meanings to the term 'neighbourhood character'. For many, character is about the people who live in the area; for others it is broad attributes of the area, such as closeness to shops or transport, how much open space or traffic there is. Because this character study has been commissioned to provide planning scheme policies and controls, it needs to be focussed on the physical planning outcomes that are capable of being influenced by planning scheme tools. Fundamentally we are aiming to answer the question: how do buildings and landscape interact? Built form, vegetation and topographical characteristics are the

physical manifestation of neighbourhood character addressed in the VPPs. The former Good Design Guide used these terms in defining neighbourhood character.

The term 'interplay' in the former Practice Note comes from the 1998 Advisory Committee report on the City of Monash neighbourhood character 'local variations' amendment. Monash have Amended their Scheme to include the Monash Neighbourhood Character study, and have also made changes to the Schedule of the Residential 1 Zone.

The Monash report coined the phrase 'qualitative interplay'. Qualitative interplay refers to the way that the main distinctive components of an area's character combine to produce a particular sense of place. This concept carries important implications:

- Neighbourhood character needs to be described in a written character statement; it is insufficient to simply produce a catalogue or list of characteristics.

- Character statements must be skilfully written to describe the synthesis of qualities that make one area distinct from another.

- Character statements should make clear which characteristics are most important, and the manner in which they relate to each other.

The term 'qualitative interplay' transcends 'private and public domains', as the Monash report emphasises. The character of buildings and their grounds cannot be divorced from the character of the street scene in which they sit. For example, in the inner suburbs of Melbourne buildings often present as solid 'walls' to the street, producing a hard, urban character. In some landscape-dominated areas on the urban fringe, natural bush vegetation flows across private property and public domain alike, only stopping at the edge of the roadway. Clearing all the trees on a private allotment would completely change the character of this type of area. So would the construction of kerb, channel and footpath, or planting of street trees of an incompatible species or in a formal pattern.

Therefore, in summary, neighbourhood character is a synthesis of public and private domain characteristics, as listed in the provisions of ResCode. It is the qualitative interplay between those characteristics that make a place, town or neighbourhood distinctive. Some of these characteristics are more important than others in creating a distinctive character.

Surveying all characteristics, then listing the 'key' characteristics, is a useful analytical tool. However a written statement that explains the interplay of the character components is necessary to properly describe, assess and evaluate the character of a particular area. This is the theoretical and statutory basis for the Preferred Character Statements that have been drafted for each precinct within the study area (as detailed in section 5).

The following definition of neighbourhood character, used by a former Department of Infrastructure working party into neighbourhood character that met in late 1999, seems to us to accommodate all of these requirements. It forms the basis of the work undertaken in this Neighbourhood Character Study :

> *Neighbourhood character is the qualitative interplay of built form, vegetation and topographic characteristics, in both the private and public domains, that make one place different from another.*

Neighbourhood Character Elements

In many areas, building type, era and spacing, the proportions and combined appearance of the 'walls' and 'floor' of the street space, and the amount and type of vegetation, are the key determinants of the area's character. How the buildings 'sit' in their landscape is critical. Vegetation includes street trees, front garden vegetation, and canopy trees in rear yards and public reserves forming a backdrop. Critical elements of the 'walls' and 'floor' of the street space are the height, permeability and profile of the 'walls': the depth of front setbacks; type of garden (eg lawn and roses, shrubs and trees, or an apparent continuation of the street space planting); presence and permeability of a front fence; and the formality (or otherwise) of the street space.

Other character components can include traffic, noise, type of activity, and demographic characteristics. Members of the public often cite these as important characteristics of their neighbourhood. People often raise amenity issues such as access to open space in character consultation sessions. All of these can be argued to be an essential part of an area's character.

Focussing on planning scheme implementation options

The important question in each case is*: how relevant is this to the task in hand*? In preparing policy and controls for implementation through the planning scheme, then the focus of the study needs to be on elements that are mentioned in either ResCode provisions or overlay controls and can therefore be addressed and influenced by the appropriate statutory tools. Many neighbourhood character elements can be addressed through other mechanisms such as social development strategies or public awareness campaigns that are outside the scope of planning schemes.

Neighbourhood Character is <u>Not</u>

The differentiation between different types of character area is not simply a question of architectural style or era of development. Neighbourhood character is founded on the layout and form of the areas, and the way that the built form interacts with and relates to the landscape. These factors should be the basis for the application of neighbourhood character policies. Neighbourhood character is not about the imposition of design styles. Rather it should be about recognising the distinctive characteristics of different urban forms, and their relationship to topography and vegetation. Getting this right is the best way of maintaining and enhancing the sense of place of the municipality's residential areas.

Nor is neighbourhood character about the amenity of adjoining properties or dwelling densities as such, although it has implications for both of these issues. In practical terms it does not dictate planning controls for either. For example, the recommended guidelines contained in the area papers with regard to spaciousness between dwellings may require that new buildings should be setback from both side boundaries. This may reduce the amount or number of buildings that can be accommodated on a site, and may also reduce potential amenity impacts from overlooking and overshadowing of adjoining properties. Front setback controls may also have a similar effect in some instances. These are secondary outcomes of the neighbourhood character guidelines, and while not the primary intent, may reduce community concerns about other aspects of new development.

Nor is character about density controls. ResCode makes no provision for density controls, and it is not considered that a policy which proposed density maximums or medium density housing saturation levels, would be supported by the Department of Sustainability and Environment. ResCode has more extensive provisions relating to

amenity issues and it is likely that once these provisions become more widely implemented many amenity concerns will be reduced.

3.2　　　　Neighbourhood Character Principles

The following principles of neighbourhood character were prepared by a former Department of Infrastructure working party into neighbourhood character that met in late 1999.　They were included in the Draft Practice Note on Neighbourhood Character published in June 2000 as part of the first draft of ResCode.　These form the basis of the process and content of the work undertaken by Planisphere for Neighbourhood Character Studies.　The principles are:

Community Values

The values of the local community are part of determining the appropriate response to neighbourhood character.　Planning controls that aim to protect, change or improve character must draw on professional and community views.

The community should be involved in identifying the neighbourhood character measures appropriate to their area.　Professionals assist in developing and translating these ideas into techniques to manage design.

Physical Focus

Character, in its broadest sense, can include environmental, social and economic factors, but the planning system is concerned with managing the physical evidence of character and related social impacts.

The planning system is primarily focussed on achieving a wide range of objectives through the physical environment.　Character is not concerned only with the private domain, as much of neighbourhood character is manifested in the public street space.　However, some character issues are related to social outcomes or impacts.　For example, the height of front fences is a town planning issue with character implications that may be physical (does a high fence contribute positively to the 'look' of the area?) and social (how do high fences affect social interaction?).

Special Qualities of an Area

All areas have a character that can be described, evaluated and, in many cases, improved.　In some areas protection of particular qualities may be warranted; but there is no distinction between areas of special character and 'the rest'.

The aim in placing greater priority on character is to improve the quality of the environment throughout Victoria's residential areas, not just in retaining or improving a few select 'special' areas that already have high amenity values. For this reason, a neighbourhood character is equally relevant everywhere. Planning controls should aim to protect identified distinctive and valued elements.

Interaction between Elements of Character

Character is about the interrelationships between various elements of an area, and so cannot be described or evaluated by considering individual elements in isolation.

Design responses need to consider the whole picture of a neighbourhood, rather than focussing upon one or two elements of the building form or siting.

Neighbourhood Character and Other Planning Policies

State and Council policies provide the rationale for decisions about whether to protect, change or improve the neighbourhood character of an area. Area-specific controls should be developed in the light of these strategic directions.

A Council's Municipal Strategic Statement will provide guidance about priorities in any particular area. Local housing issues and other Melbourne 2030 directions such as focusing higher density development around activity centres will be important considerations.

Preferred Character

Neighbourhood character descriptions and evaluations should focus on the preferred character of an area.

Descriptions of existing characteristics are an important part of the process of identifying the 'starting point', but the desired character needs to be evaluated and considered in the context of other policy priorities. It may be that some areas should be encouraged to develop a new character, just as there may be some areas where critical elements need to be protected or reflected in all new development. The concept of preferred character is discussed in detail in section 5.1.

Neighbourhood Character Typologies

There are a limited number of consistent precinct types that can be defined, and frequently appropriate policy responses can be formulated without the need for expensive studies.

The 'Responding to Neighbourhood Character' ResCode Practice Note has adopted this approach in presenting possible policy responses to three typical residential character types. This is not to say that detailed analysis can be completely avoided, but much can be gained from shared understandings. Many councils have undertaken very detailed character studies and this information may supplement the examples provided.

Site Analysis

A site analysis, specifically from the neighbourhood character perspective, is necessary whether or not a detailed character study has been undertaken.

A site analysis is a mandatory requirement of ResCode.

Character and Heritage

Character and heritage share many attributes, but there are important differences between the two concepts. Community values are a key justification for the protection of neighbourhood character. Policies to transform character may be appropriate in some areas.

Character studies evaluate the interplay of built form, vegetation and topographical qualities, with reference to styles and ages where relevant, whereas heritage studies evaluate cultural heritage significance, with some reference to built form, vegetation and topographical qualities. Heritage studies designate levels of significance for sites or precincts by assessment against

established criteria and by way of comparison with other heritage places. The basis of neighbourhood character is that *every* place has character regardless of its age or appearance and community feedback is an important means by which the value of this character can be understood. (See below for further discussion.)

Character and Amenity

The difference between neighbourhood character and amenity must be recognised.

Character and amenity are terms often used interchangeably, but in ResCode factors like visual and acoustic privacy and overshadowing should continue to be treated as issues separate to neighbourhood character.

3.3   Neighbourhood Character Types

Four Neighbourhood Character Types of Victoria

Neighbourhood character is a fundamental of sense of place in residential communities. While many councils have undertaken neighbourhood character studies, little or no attempt has been made to generalise the findings of these studies into a typology of neighbourhood character types. Broadly speaking, the following neighbourhood character types have been identified across Victoria:

Built Form / Landscape Relationship	Character Type
Built form dominated residential areas	'Inner Urban'
Spacious residential areas in a garden setting (formal street pattern, generally modified grid)	'Garden Suburban'
Spacious residential areas in a garden setting (informal, generally curving street pattern with courts/cul-de-sacs)	'Garden Court'
Landscape dominated residential areas	'Bush Suburban'

Table 3: Victorian Neighbourhood Types

These four broad categories illustrate the four main types of residential areas that exist in Victoria, from an urban design perspective. The differentiation between these types is NOT based on architectural style or era of development. It is founded on the layout and form of the areas, and the way that the built form interacts with and relates to the landscape. These factors should be the basis for the application of neighbourhood character policies. Neighbourhood character is NOT about the imposition of design styles. Rather it should be about recognising the distinctive characteristics of different urban forms, and their relationship to topography and vegetation. Getting this right is the best way of maintaining and enhancing the sense of place of the state's residential areas.

An initial version of these character types, prepared by Planisphere, was included in the Draft Practice Note on Neighbourhood Character published in June 2000 as part of the first draft of ResCode. Although this Practice Note has since been superseded, it provided some useful principles about the nature of neighbourhood character. The upgraded version of the character types shown here is included in *Sense of Place: urban design principles for the Metropolitan Strategy*, a technical report on urban design prepared by Planisphere and published in October 2002 as part of the Metropolitan Strategy.

Local Neighbourhood Character Types

In establishing a system of neighbourhood character description for a particular place, these broad level definitions are a useful starting point, from which further detailed classification can follow. They form the basis for definition of local character types. In undertaking neighbourhood character studies, Planisphere first establish a municipal-wide framework of broad character types. Within these broad areas further, finer-grained definition of character follows with the identification of precincts.

Often neighbourhood character studies identify wide variations within these broad character types, and these are important in differentiating the character of one neighbourhood from another, and in creating or strengthening sense of place.

The neighbourhood character of Darebin is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

4. Neighbourhood Character of Darebin

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4.1   Community Values

Three main sources have been used to gain an understanding of community perceptions about the character of Darebin: the community workshops; the disposable camera exercise and the three Community Committee meetings held at each stage of the study.

Importance of Neighbourhood Character

At the public workshops held at the start of the project, and for the photographic survey that followed, participants were asked three questions: *What do you like about your neighbourhood? What do you dislike about your neighbourhood? What would you like to see improved?*

Answers to these questions provide useful insights into the importance local people place on matters directly relevant to neighbourhood character as referred to in ResCode. In some communities, the discussion may be exclusively about the physical characteristics of the neighbourhood's buildings, streets and landscapes. In others, the discussion may focus on issues that have little direct relevance to this specific definition of character, for example street safety, traffic, maintenance, and adequacy of services. Most discussions focus on a mix of ResCode-related character topics and non-planning scheme related topics, with the mix varying from community to community.

A commonly expressed view is that *people* are the most important aspect of an area's character. This is a valid perspective, one that cannot be argued against in an impassioned public forum. Planning scheme tools are explicitly formulated to avoid personalising land use issues, and no planner wants to become involved in debate about who should be allowed to live in an area. But it can readily be conceded that the built form character we see today is the result of actions by people, and that future evolution of character will be determined in the same way. Neighbourhood character cannot be viewed as a dry, academic branch of urban design theory, divorced from the values of local people. The 'look' of a place is only one aspect of its character, but it is one that the planning system allows us to influence for the good of the wider community. In doing so, we should be constantly aware of values and aspirations of local citizens.

Neighbourhood Character Values in Darebin

Community Workshops

Three community workshops were held and these were attended by approximately 45 residents. People were also very keen to participate in the disposable camera photographic survey and nominate for the Community Committee, indicating that neighbourhood character in Darebin is an important issue to many residents.

A lot of useful information was gained about community perceptions of the various parts of the municipality and people's aspirations for the future of their neighbourhood. Overall, the responses from the workshops and disposable camera exercise can be encapsulated into the following main issues:

Vegetation and landscaping in public and private domains was something that many residents said they liked in their neighbourhood, but felt that gardens and trees could be better maintained to enhance the quality of streetscapes. Many residents also felt that natural landscapes of the Darebin and Merri Creeks complemented the character of neighbourhoods.

Heritage and period buildings were emphasised as being highly valued by residents of Darebin. Many participants listed Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar dwellings as being important to the character of their area and said that they generally liked restorations and renovations to period buildings which added to the quality of housing stock.

Architectural quality was frequently cited as a major consideration, but with a variety of responses. Some people liked the diversity of architecture in Darebin and the innovation of new designs, while others found contemporary buildings to often lack respect for their neighbourhood context.

Building scale is a common concern among many residents of Darebin. A number of participants stated that they disliked the scale of newer dwellings in particular which did not 'fit in' with the neighbourhood in terms of building height and floor plan. Some residents also felt that multi-dwelling developments were out of scale with the neighbourhoods in which they were located.

Family homes and spacious surrounds were frequently cited as being highly valued by residents. Many participants said that they liked homes that could accommodate families on larger blocks with generous garden spaces.

Traffic and parking congestion was listed by many people as something they disliked about their neighbourhood. In the inner urban areas where many properties have on-street parking and streets widths are tight, this was a particular problem.

Access to shops, services, parklands, schools and transport was seen to be an attribute for all parts of the municipality.

A summary of the responses from the workshops is included in Appendix 2.

Community Committee

Throughout the course of the Study, three Community Committee Meetings were held, enabling Community Committee members to comment on various stages and products of the Study, as well as discuss important issues related to neighbourhood character.

The first Community Committee Meeting was held in December 2005 and involved an introduction to the Study, including the brief, method and timing, and terms of reference for the Community Committee. The Study team presented photo boards to the Committee which generated discussion regarding what members thought were important factors related to neighbourhood character. Some of these included:

- The public realm and the importance of maintaining parks and garden spaces for recreational and aesthetic purposes.

- The consistency (or lack thereof) of building setbacks and their relationship with gardens and private open space.

- Building scale and concerns about development that is out of scale with streetscapes.

- The balance between consistency and variety within streetscapes.

- Building style and related issues including reproduction versus contemporary styles.

- On-street car parking and its impact on the character of streets.

- The importance of a welcoming front entrance in terms of door, window and fence design to avoid a sense of hostility in streetscapes.

- Planning controls available to address character issues and realise a preferred neighbourhood character.

The second Community Committee meeting was held in February 2006 and included discussion regarding the detailed survey, Character Area Types, Precinct Issues Papers and the relationship between the Neighbourhood Character Study and the Housing Distribution Strategy and structure plan areas.

Some community members spoke about the importance of having a diversity of building styles to make streetscapes more interesting. Discussion also revolved around the importance of providing a range of housing types to suit different household needs. Members also spoke about how architecture could support the interaction of residents and the need to provide front gardens and avoid 'hostile' elements such as blank walls.

The third Community Committee meeting was held in March 2006 and involved consultation feedback on the Precinct Issues Papers, the presentation of an example final brochure and an outline of the next steps for the Committee in terms of comments on the brochures and guidelines. Throughout the meeting, members discussed the implementation of the objectives and guidelines to ensure that they are achieved and enforced. Some also raised concerns regarding the demolition of period buildings.

A summary of the responses from the workshops and Community Committee are included in Appendixes 2 and 6 respectively.

4.2 Surveys

The 1998 Neighbourhood Character Study comprised two surveys of the municipality: a broad scale preliminary survey to establish the 8 Character Area Types. This was followed by a street-by-street survey of all residential areas in the municipality to identify character precincts and prepare design guidelines for each.

In Stage 1 of this Study a street-by-street survey of all residential areas was conducted. The purpose of this survey was to check the existing information for each precinct and note any changes to character that had occurred since 1998.

Character Area Types

The preliminary survey of the 1998 Study provided an invaluable overview of the entire municipality and established a 'neighbourhood character framework' upon which could be based subsequent work. The 8 broad Character Area Types were mapped and a set of key characteristics and potential threats were identified for each.

The survey conducted in this 2006 Study confirmed the existing Character Area Types, with the exception of Types G and H that were updated to reflect recent development: Type G was amended from 1960s-1970s to 1960s-1980s and Type H was amended from 1980s-1990s to 1990s-2000s.

The Character Area Types are shown as colour coded areas on the precinct map included as Appendix 4. The main features of each are outlined in the following pages.

A	Victorian and Edwardian	• Precincts comprise Victorian and Edwardian cottages, both single and double fronted, generally in the areas of central and southern Northcote, Westgarth, and parts of Thornbury.
		• Buildings are mostly constructed of weatherboard, brick or render.
		• Streetscapes are often inconsistent in physical form, reflecting the organic and loosely formed character of precincts within this type. A small number of streets retain continuous rows of Victorian and Edwardian dwellings.
		• Streets generally have a pedestrian-friendly character due to the closeness of buildings to the street and to each other, the openness of front boundary treatments and the absence of vehicle cross-overs.
		• Rear laneways are common throughout this character type.
		• A number of streets are lined by formal avenue trees which complement these areas.
		• The subdivision pattern is a grid and streets have an all-over dark grey asphalt hue, which complements the era and varied forms of development by providing a neutral backdrop.
B	Victorian / Edwardian / Interwar Mix	• This combination of Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar dwellings occurs in precincts throughout Northcote, Thornbury and Preston.
		• These areas were developed over a long period of time, and although housing styles are varied, dwellings often share a similar scale, form and setting, and are constructed of similar materials.
		• Buildings are generally low-scale, with mostly single storey dwellings and occasional two storeys.
		• Building form is predominantly 'L'-shape, with pitched roofs, either gabled or hipped. Roofs often form the most dominant section of the building.
		• Properties generally have a garden setting with vegetation in front and side setbacks.
		• Some streetscapes are particularly consistent, with common wall materials, a regular rhythm of frontage widths and setbacks, a mature avenue of canopy trees, or common roof forms and materials.
C	Victorian / Edwardian / Interwar / Postwar / 1960s Mix	• These areas contain a strong mix of building styles, with dwellings from the Victorian, Edwardian, Interwar, Postwar and 1960s/1970s eras. This is the most varied character type of all those in the City of Darebin.
		• These areas reflect the speculative nature of land purchase and the gradual nature of land development over a long period of time.
		• In some cases redevelopment has occurred in the form of 'walk-up' flats constructed throughout the 1960s and 1970s.
		• Buildings are a mix of brick or timber construction, with roofs being either tin, tile, or occasionally, slate.
		• Front and side setbacks vary considerably from site to site.
		• Front fence design often relates to the period of the dwelling, resulting in a variety of boundary treatments.
		• Some streetscapes are more consistent than others, with common wall materials, a regular rhythm of frontage widths and setbacks, consistent fence styles, a mature avenue of canopy trees or common roof forms and materials.

D	Interwar (predominantly California Bungalow)	• Rows of modest Interwar, predominantly Californian Bungalow style, dwellings line many streetscapes in these southern central parts of the municipality. • In other parts of metropolitan Melbourne, Californian Bungalows are set on large allotments with generous side setbacks however, in Darebin these types of dwellings are compressed into narrower blocks, sometimes 9m wide. • Dwellings are predominantly constructed of weatherboard with tin roofs. There are also some examples of red-brick bungalows with terra cotta tile roofing. • Some streetscapes retain continuous rows of Californian Bungalows with a distinctive street scene. In these streets, elaborate gable facades present a heavily articulated wall to the street. • Traditionally, front boundary treatments consisted of mesh and rail, picket, or low brick fences. In some cases these have been replaced. • Established gardens, with shrubs, lawn and occasional canopy trees are readily visible through low or transparent front fences. • Streetscapes are complemented by concrete kerbed roadways, often with a bluestone channel, with a concrete footpath and nature strip.
E	Interwar / Postwar	• Precincts contain a mix of Interwar, Postwar and other eras of housing, generally in large parts of Reservoir and Preston. • Housing styles are varied however they often share a similar scale, form and setting, and are constructed of similar materials. • Building scale is generally single storey, and the form 'L' shape in plan, with a pitched roof, either gabled or hipped. • Roofs often form the most dominant element of the building, imposing a horizontal emphasis on the streetscape. • Setbacks vary, but are often generous, allowing sites to accommodate an established garden setting. • Front fences are predominantly low, either solid or semi-transparent, or in some cases fences are absent.
F	Postwar	• These precincts, which occur throughout the more northern and eastern parts of the municipality were developed rapidly in the Postwar era to relieve housing shortages. • Buildings often have a consistent, double-fronted detached form however they vary in style and use of materials despite the common era of development. • While immediate Postwar dwellings consisted of simple plan forms and materials, small rooms and minimal eaves, standards gradually improved in the 1950s, with the construction of cream brick, triple fronted homes with ample roof and sometimes curved glass windows. • Dwellings are generally 'L' shape in form, with consistent front and side setbacks. • Front gardens are often generously sized, with back yard plantings that can be glimpsed through gaps between buildings, which often include a driveway. • Front fences are generally low brick, or are absent altogether, creating a spacious feel that is enhanced by wider than normal nature strips. • Precincts have a regular subdivision pattern, with concrete kerbs and footpaths, and medium sized street trees.

G 1960s-1980s	• These eras represent a maturing of the immediate Postwar suburban style with a more spacious, better quality style of development. Some larger-scale dwellings, both contemporary and reproduction began to emerge in the 1980s.
	• Houses are predominantly detached, single storey (some two storey), double or triple fronted and 'L' shape in form. In some areas dwellings are placed at an angle to the street.
	• Buildings are consistently constructed of brick in either cream, orange or brown tones, with dark coloured concrete tile roofs, lending a more homogenous character to these areas.
	• Front gardens are often generously sized, and back yard plantings can sometimes be seen through the gaps between buildings, which often include a driveway.
	• Front boundary treatments either consist of low solid fences or no fences at all, resulting in a spacious feel.
	• Subdivision pattern is curvilinear and streets are lined with concrete kerbs, nature strips and footpaths.
	• Street trees are generally small to medium size.
H 1990s-2000s	• Building style is mixed, however reproduction and contemporary styles predominate.
	• Dwellings are large, both in ground plan and height, while allotment sizes are relatively small.
	• Buildings are mostly constructed of brick or render with tile roofing.
	• Garages and driveways often dominate the front of the dwelling and a greater proportion of the front yard area and footpath is often devoted to hard paved areas such as driveways and crossovers.
	• Vegetation, both in private gardens and in the public domain is generally low-level, with immature trees and shrubs and small lawn spaces.
	• The streetscape is less formal than other character types, with a curvilinear street pattern, a less defined boundary between public and private domains and varying arrangements of the footpath and nature strip.

Detailed Survey

The detailed street-by-street survey included all residential and mixed use areas in the municipality. This survey checked each street against the list of existing characteristics of each precinct guideline of the 1998 Study, as listed below. Where changes had occurred these were noted, with a view to assessing whether precinct boundaries or definitions required updating. Many photographs were taken and these were an important resource for subsequent stages of the study. The field notes and photographs from the survey will be lodged with the Council for future reference.

Key characteristics		Other characteristics
Era / style of development	Vehicle access & storage	Topography
Materials	Front boundary treatment	Street trees – spacing and species
Position on site	Garden style	
Height and form	Subdivision pattern	Kerbs and channel
Roofing form and materials		Footpaths / nature strips
		Local landmarks or views

The aim of the survey was to gather information about characteristics that remain consistent across a wider area, rather than to produce accurate information about characteristics property-by-property. Data collected was aimed at determining the 'key' characteristics of areas, as opposed to a catalogue of unrelated or peripheral information. The survey data showed where these broad characteristics change and from this information, the current precinct descriptions and boundaries could be checked and updated as required.

The detailed survey results were incorporated into the Precinct Issues Papers with an overall description for each precinct, supported by a detailed list of key characteristics. These were produced for comment by the Community Committee.

Precinct Issues Papers

The detailed survey results were incorporated into the Precinct Issues Papers with an overall description for each precinct, supported by a detailed list of key characteristics. These are discussed in detail in section 5.1.

4.3   The Character of Darebin

The residential neighbourhoods of Darebin have a number of key defining features that distinguish it from other municipalities. The study team has gained an understanding of the City's neighbourhoods through:

- the preliminary overview survey and detailed street-by-street survey.

- meetings with the Steering Committee, comprised of Council officers.

- meetings with the Community Committee, comprised of community representatives and design professionals.

- the feedback received from the Community Committee and Steering Committee at each stage of the study.

- the study team's existing knowledge of the characteristics of residential areas across greater Melbourne, developed through numerous previous character studies.

Diversity of residential environments

The 1998 Neighbourhood Character Study illustrated the evolution of the City's residential areas and how they have been shaped by social, cultural and economic factors. These have left the legacy of a rich and diverse urban form that ranges from the dense nineteenth century inner urban neighbourhoods, to the Postwar middle ring suburbs, to the recent outermost developments. This diversity is clearly illustrated in the Character Areas and Precincts map and is an important aspect of Darebin's residential character.

The City of Darebin developed from a rural and agricultural area to an industrial base gradually, over a one-hundred year period. Original residential buildings were generally constructed for the convenience of local workers, as well as inner city workers who sought larger houses and allotments on cheaper land at Northcote and Preston. The Postwar years led to a rapid growth in population, largely fuelled by immigrants. Throughout this era, the northern and eastern parts of the municipality were developed and a wave of flat development occurred in the City's more established areas.

The pattern of residential development throughout the City has been influenced by a number of factors, ranging from geology and topography to the sporadic

development of public transport and the nature of land speculation. The original street pattern was based on the Darebin and Merri Creeks, which border the City. Hilltops were favoured locations for housing. The basalt geology of the north eastern part of the municipality restrained much residential development until the Postwar period. Varying soil conditions and sporadic and uncoordinated public transport development may have influenced the 'patchy' nature of development in much of the southern half of the municipality. The nature of speculative land purchase, which left many blocks undeveloped until after World War 1, also had a large impact on the pattern of residential development, and is clearly seen in the mix of buildings eras and styles of these areas.

Early speculative land purchase throughout the 1850s did see a scattering of residential development in the more favourable locations, particularly on hilltops and by the riverside. Rucker's Hill became the first focus of suburban development in the 1850s, while Preston, by contrast, had become attractive for settlers who built modest timber dwellings. The 1880s land boom saw extensive speculative subdivision. Worker housing was more densely developed in terrace form close to shops and other amenities. The more attractive hillside and Yarra allotments of Northcote and Fairfield attracted wealthier residents, and some boom-style mansions still remain in these locations. In Preston, despite extensive subdivision, relatively little land was actually developed.

The early twentieth century saw rapid growth throughout the municipality, although whole areas remained largely undeveloped until after World War 2 (e.g. west of St Georges Road). Tramway construction and railway electrification throughout the interwar years helped to consolidate the development of such areas. Preston Council imposed minimum allotment sizes throughout this period, and became a favourite suburb for State Bank and, later, Housing Commission housing.

The Postwar era saw the gradual development of the basalt areas of east and north Preston, largely with detached brick-veneer housing. Extensive flat development took place in the established areas of Northcote and Preston throughout the Postwar and 1960s-70s eras, changing the face of many suburban streets with higher scale built form. By the 1970s, Preston and Northcote had more overseas-born residents than most areas of Melbourne as Postwar immigration flourished. This has had a significant influence upon the character of the City's residential and commercial areas.

Changing environments

Over the past eight years, since the 1998 Neighbourhood Character Study was completed, many changes have taken place throughout Darebin's residential neighbourhoods. These changes have necessitated this review of the original Study to ensure that the precinct boundaries, existing characteristics, preferred character, guidelines and policies are up to date and relevant to the situation on the ground.

Some precincts remain largely the same, with limited infill and modest changes in the form of restorations and extensions. However, many established residential areas have experienced change in the form of alterations to existing buildings, building replacement, subdivision and new infill dwellings. This has impacted on the overall neighbourhood character of these precincts. These changes have generally occurred in the more central and northern parts of the municipality, where existing architectural quality has warranted building replacement.

Areas within the Heritage Overlay throughout the south of the municipality have remained largely intact, with minor alterations to buildings consistent with Heritage Overlay controls. Outside of these Heritage Overlay areas, traditional Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar areas throughout the southern parts of the municipality have

been subject to redevelopment and infill dwellings, often of contemporary or reproduction style.

Closer to main roads and public transport routes, some multi-dwelling development has occurred, also throughout many of the more southern precincts.

In the central and southern parts of the municipality ex-industrial sites and disused tracts of land have made way for new brownfield residential development. Industrial land in Darebin has provided a significant opportunity over the last decade to accommodate residential development through innovative building conversions as well as building replacement. There are several industrial or ex-industrial sites that have been identified by the Council as key strategic redevelopment sites that have been examined as a part of this Study. The high profile location and development potential of some of these sites (particularly for higher density housing) requires that special guidelines be developed to ensure that proposals involve a high quality of architectural design with minimal impact on surrounding residential areas.

Current and former Commission and State Bank housing areas have also provided opportunities for new development, particularly in the Preston area. The high value placed on the consistency of some of these areas has seen the application of the Heritage Overlay and the retention of buildings that contribute to consistent streetscapes, however, in some parts of the municipality these areas have not been as highly valued, resulting in alterations to dwellings and sometimes building replacement. Generally in the case of areas that contain single detached dwellings constructed of red brick or concrete, new development can often appear incompatible with existing dwellings, particularly where it is out of scale or constructed with contrasting materials.

Substantial new development has occurred within new building estates on Greenfield subdivisions since the 1998 Neighbourhood Character Study was completed. The north-eastern parts of the municipality have seen the development of two new master-planned communities – Springthorpe and Lancaster Gate. Dwellings in these building estates are typical of the 1990s-2000s era with large dwellings, either contemporary or reproduction in style. These areas have mostly been excluded from the Neighbourhood Character Study as existing Section 173 Agreements apply to the land and adequately address neighbourhood character issues. The construction of the Mount Cooper Estate, to the east of Bundoora Park, is also near completion and contains a range of large contemporary and reproduction style buildings as well as some multi-dwelling/terrace developments. The Mount Cooper Estate has been included in the review of the Neighbourhood Character Study.

Dwelling types and architectural styles

The stages of the municipality's development, as previously described, are reflected in the range of dwelling types and styles. These include:

- Victorian era cottages and terraces scattered throughout the southern parts of the municipality, and a very small number of Victorian mansions remaining from the era.

- Edwardian era cottages and terraces concentrated in the southern parts of the municipality and along transport routes.

- Californian Bungalows and other Interwar dwellings in previously undeveloped pockets south of Bell Street, and throughout larger areas north of Bell Street.

- Housing Commission and State Bank housing throughout pockets of the central part of the municipality.

- Postwar brick 'L' shape dwellings with driveways, garages and large garden areas throughout Preston and Reservoir.

- Infill development of 1960s-1970s blocks of flats and single dwellings north and south of Bell Street.

- Dwellings constructed from the 1980s onwards including reproduction and contemporary styles of a wide range of forms and materials, concentrated in the northern-most parts of the municipality.

- Contemporary multi-unit infill development throughout established suburbs, particularly closer to main roads and along transport routes.

- A limited number of distinctive contemporary architect designed dwellings.

- A greater number of contemporary buildings that do not appear to be architecturally designed, displaying a lower standard of quality in the design and materials selection.

- Recent redevelopment of ex-industrial land with multi-dwelling developments.

- Recent development of master-planned communities and housing estates in the north of the municipality, many of which include a higher density of housing than surrounding established residential areas.

- Many different approaches to the detailing and decoration of buildings and gardens that expresses the distinct and highly valued cultural diversity of the municipality.

The Natural Environment

The natural environment provides a strong character element throughout parts of the municipality. Several precincts are enhanced by the landscape character of adjoining natural environments, and in some areas, the natural environment results in constraints for new development and the selection of vegetation species.

Creeks

The City of Darebin contains or abuts four creeks including Merri Creek, Darebin Creek, Central Creek and Edgars Creek. The natural environments of the Merri and Darebin Creeks form the western and eastern boundaries of the municipality, providing open space corridors that give adjoining residential areas a particularly special character.

Development within some precincts fully acknowledges these creek-side environs, with dwellings constructed of materials that are natural in appearance (i.e. muted colours, non-reflective surfaces, rough timber, unpainted brickwork or light coloured render) and gardens comprising indigenous vegetation species. Some precincts, however, contain development that largely fails to respond these natural environments in their design and materials selection, gardens that comprise exotic or 'weed' species and high or solid front fences that interrupt the flow of vegetation across the landscape and streetscape.

Indigenous landscapes

Darebin is also home to a number of indigenous parkland and grassland areas that provide a unique character element for adjoining residential areas.

Bundoora Park, in the north-east of the municipality, is a particularly striking example of a natural bushland landscape within the municipal area. The park, which comprises Mount Cooper, provides a pleasant, bushy outlook for nearby precincts

that contain views to the area. The natural bushland landscapes of LaTrobe University, Gresswell Forest Wildlife Reserve and the Darebin Parklands have a similar impact on adjoining residential precincts.

Grassland areas within the municipality include the Central Creek Grasslands, and those within and adjoining Bundoora Park. These grassland areas have an interesting impact on surrounding residential areas due to the sense of openness that they create. Buildings within some precincts tend to dominate nearby grasslands through their height, bulk or materials selection, while others are respectful of the low-level nature of these landscapes.

Geology and soil types

The geology and related soil types of the City of Darebin have a strong impact on the neighbourhood character of precincts.

The north-western suburbs of the municipality, including Reservoir and the central and northern parts of Preston, are located on clay soil with generally poor drainage. The large shrink-swell capacity of this soil type can cause cracks in walls and pavements and limits the range of plants which can be grown in this location. Precincts throughout this area are generally lacking in the vegetation cover and tree canopy that can be achieved in the north-eastern-most and southern parts of the municipality.

Bundoora, in the north-east of the City is situated on moderately well-drained soil that is good for a wide variety of plants. Indigenous and native plant species thrive throughout this part of the municipality due to the water holding capacity of the soil.

In the more southern parts of the municipality, soil type is suited to a larger range of plants including both native and exotic species. In some streetscapes, this has resulted in the success of avenues of large exotic trees. It has also meant that vegetation in private gardens has been able to contribute to a continuous canopy of trees across precincts.

Landscape Quality

The combined effect of landscaping in private gardens and the public domain create distinct residential environments in many precincts throughout Darebin.

Despite the smaller lot sizes generally associated with the southern parts of the municipality, the landscape quality of these areas is relatively high. Precincts generally south of Bell Street contain well-established gardens which combine with regular street trees and in some cases exotic avenue trees to create a leafy atmosphere that forms an important part of the neighbourhood character.

Towards the north west of the City, dwellings tend to have larger private open spaces that, when combined with the wide streets, contribute to a spacious feeling. Residential properties in these areas generally have low levels of vegetation cover, explained in part by the soil types evident in these areas of the municipality. Street trees are generally medium-sized, and although they are planted regularly in most streets, they tend to have a relatively low impact on the overall character of the streetscape. Selected streets are lined with larger, native species of trees that provide relief from the built form and give streetscapes a sense of continuity.

Throughout the north-eastern-most parts of the municipality, native vegetation both in the public and private domains is a particularly distinct part of the residential environment. Much of this vegetation is remnant, comprising large eucalypts which create a bushy atmosphere.

While some pockets of the City contain private gardens that are predominated by native vegetation, as noted, most property owners favour the use of exotic vegetation.

Local Landmarks

Local landmarks can be a significant part of the neighbourhood character of precincts and help to distinguish them from other areas. The 1998 Study listed the most important landmarks for each precinct and these have been updated in the recent surveys. Local landmarks include:

- Parks, playgrounds, sports grounds and open spaces

- Creeks and grasslands

- Churches spires or tall buildings that can be seen from a distance

- Large institutional sites, such as schools, the TAFE or the former PANCH site

- Mansions from the Victorian or Edwardian era that are still present amongst later subdivisions

- Town Halls, train stations and large shopping centres

- Particularly distinct street planting themes

- Variations in topography, such as the elevated area of Ruckers Hill in Northcote, or the low-lying grasslands along Central Creek.

5. Character Directions for Darebin

5.1   Precincts

Precinct Issues Papers

Following the survey and the first stage of community consultation, the study team produced a set of Precinct Issues Papers, one for each precinct (refer Appendix 5).

In many instances the Study confirmed and reinforced the existing precinct boundaries and descriptions. However, some parts of the municipality had experienced considerable change in either their physical characteristics or policy direction since the 1998 Study. For these areas precinct boundaries and descriptions were adjusted to reflect these changes.

The Precinct Issues Papers were produced for the second Community Committee meeting. Detailed comments were received from Committee members and Council planning staff in the following weeks and these were incorporated into the final stage of the study. A compilation of the comments, and responses to the comments, is provided in Appendix 6.

Each Precinct Issues Paper comprises:

Precinct Description and Existing Characteristics

The existing characteristics of each precinct was described (refer section 4.2). This was based on the description in the 1998 Study and updated data from the recent survey, and revised with input from the Council and Community Committee.

Map and Photographs

The Precinct Issues Papers included indicative photos of the different types of dwellings in the area and a small map (as included in the 1998 Study brochures) to show the extent of the precinct.

Policy Context

Local and State Government policy affecting each precinct was summarised.

Community Values

The community values were summarised as closely as possible from feedback received at the workshops and at the Community Committee meetings. The values articulated were later used to arrive at the Preferred Character Statement for each precinct.

Issues/Threats

A summary of issues and threats in each precinct was provided under this heading. This included development pressures and recent changes, and their potential consequences, identified by the Council and residents. The summary includes issues raised at the community workshops and the Community Committee meetings, as well as written feedback received during the course of the study. The consultant team's field work also noted the obvious development pressures in the various precincts.

Draft Preferred Character Statement

Each Precinct Issues Paper concludes with a preferred character statement. This is a description of the desirable future character for that area, based on the existing characteristics and community values discussed at the workshops. The preferred character statement is important because it provides the starting point for development of the design guidelines. This is discussed in the following sections.

Precinct Delineation

Review of precinct delineation

The brief for this Study required that the neighbourhood character precincts delineated in the 1998 Study be reviewed. As noted in section 4.3 many precincts have experienced change since 1998. This is a result of new infill development, redevelopment of large sites or further subdivision.

In addition, areas that have been subject to studies that address urban form and character have been removed from the study area. This relates to the Northcote and Preston structure plans, the High Street UDF and the Darebin Junction plan. In some instances the boundaries of precincts adjoining these areas needed to be reconfigured as a result.

Precinct delineation is arrived at by considering three main factors: preferred character, similarity of existing characteristics and threats, and the useability of proposed boundaries in practical terms. In the site survey the boundaries of the existing precincts were checked against the information within each precinct brochure of the 1998 Study for relevance and the boundaries and brochure information updated as required.

Several small areas or individual sites were omitted from the 1998 Study and the adjoining precinct boundaries were redrawn accordingly. New precincts were also created for areas in the north of the municipality that had not been developed in 1998.

Neighbourhood and site description

ResCode provides for a process of neighbourhood and site description that encompasses an assessment of neighbourhood character. The preparation of a character study does not remove the need for a site assessment. Local conditions and the specific circumstances need to be assessed and considered alongside the preferred character for the area. They may also change over time. It is not necessary for a character study to provide a detailed brief for every site. The character study should provide the broad future direction, complemented by the neighbourhood and site description, which assesses detailed local conditions.

Interface Issues

There are two situations where interface issues are of importance. The first relates to the immediate interface between two adjoining precincts. Precincts are usually delineated using identifiable physical elements such as roads. In many cases, however, the actual boundary may be slightly blurred such that the characteristics of the adjoining precinct may also apply to the land in question. Where this occurs, the adjoining precinct guidelines should be taken into account in the assessment of proposals on land adjoining another precinct.

The second occasion where interface issues are of importance is in specific situations where a residential area adjoins an area outside the study boundaries.

This includes public reserves, institutions, the railway or creek corridors and commercial or industrial areas. In addition, the style and era of development within Heritage Overlay areas often has an influence upon the existing and preferred future character of adjoining neighbourhoods.

Character and Preferred Future Character

Since the completion of the 1998 Neighbourhood Character Study, a greater emphasis has been placed in neighbourhood character theory on *preferred future character*. Without an explicit emphasis on preferred character, neighbourhood character studies tend to dwell on existing characteristics. Neighbourhood character studies are now required to express a vision for the future and suggest how this could be achieved. This statement is the starting point in considering neighbourhood character issues and commonly it is given statutory weight through inclusion in a Council's MSS or local policy.

While the original brochures from the 1998 Study have included a 'Statement of Desired Future Character' for each precinct, this is in the form of a list of neighbourhood character elements. Current practice now requires that a statement of neighbourhood character be drafted to show the *inter-relationship* of the desired neighbourhood character elements, the importance of which is detailed in section 3.1, rather than as an inventory of disparate elements. In addition, the 'Statement of Desired Future Character' does not feature prominently in the original brochure format, nor is it given any statutory weight by including the statement in local policy.

Preferred Character Statement

The Preferred Character Statement is an expression of the elements of the neighbourhood that make it distinctive or valued, projected into the future. It therefore takes into account variations in both the characteristics of the locality and the extent to which these are important in defining its character. Some areas have a large number of elements that are valued or preferred and need to be represented in new development, and others have less. The retention of preferred/valued existing elements or reflection of preferred/valued elements in the new development creates a character that is a Preferred Future Character.

The types of characteristics identified in each precinct and their relative significance in Council-wide and regional terms is a starting point for determining the Preferred Future Character of an area. What is it about each precinct that makes it distinctive, and to what extent is this distinctiveness important on a local, regional or state level?

The detailed survey material gathered during this study identifies the consistency and form of the various characteristics of each street and enables comparisons across the study area. The consultants' experience in these types of studies throughout the State enables a regional and State context to be assessed. The community's aspirations for their area are the final defining element in the equation for determining the Preferred Future Character, however these must be realistic and reflect the key or valued aspects of the area.

The key and valued elements are contained under the Precinct Description, Key Existing Characteristics and Community Values headings of the brochures, and the Preferred Character Statement is the culmination of this information.

Precincts and Preferred Character

As noted, *preferred* character is the main criterion for precinct delineation. Character studies that attempt to delineate every variation in *current* characteristics often

produce very large numbers of areas. While this approach might have some benefits in achieving a finer grain of information, it also results in some disadvantages and tends to not be responsive to the community's aspirations for their area.

Furthermore, preferred character should be a concept that provides a broad direction rather than prescriptive detail. Achieving an uninterrupted flow of landscape and vegetation across private and public domain might be the main aim of a preferred character statement. From this aim, numbers of policies and guidelines are derived. These are cognisant of the existing situation with boundary treatments, site coverage etc, but fine grain local variations in these characteristics today should not preclude the setting of an aim to create, in the future, a consistent character across a broader area. Town planning is, after all, about creating desired futures. Town planning policy should be arrived at after considering existing conditions. It should not necessarily be determined by them.

Precinct Brochures and Character Guidelines

Following the detailed comments received on the Precinct Issues Papers, the study team prepared Precinct Brochures that included updated design guidelines.

The design guidelines address various character elements where relevant to that precinct. They include vegetation, topography, siting, height, setback, roof or building form, materials and design detail and front boundary treatment.

The performance based design guidelines address these character elements as relevant to the circumstances and preferred character of the precinct.

For each precinct, the guidelines comprise:

- **Character Element:** provides a general classification relating to the relevant character objective (i.e. siting, vegetation etc).
- **Objective:** briefly states the desired action relating to each character element.
- **Design Response:** outlines the specific ways in which the objective can be achieved.
- **Avoid:** states what design methods to avoid when trying to achieve the objective.

A copy of the draft guidelines was presented at the third Community Committee meeting. Detailed feedback was received from the Committee members and Council officers and incorporated into the final version of the brochures. The comments and responses are summarised in Appendix 7.

The final product of the Study will include graphically presented brochures for each precinct with maps, photographs and illustrated design guidelines.

5.2 Key Character Issues

Key character issues have emerged from the preparation of the brochures for each precinct. These have been discussed with the community, and have become evident the character analysis of the municipality (summarised in section 4.3 of this report) and the policy context (section 2).

Examination of these issues is the starting point for consideration of implementation options. In determining the most appropriate means of implementation, and what it is that we would like the implementation method to achieve, the key character issues to be addressed must be clearly understood. They are summarised as follows.

Overall objectives

The statutory implementation measures of the Study should address:

- The importance of neighbourhood character to the community of Darebin and the key community values that emerged during the preparation of the Study.

- The variation between the eight Character Area Types (as outlined in section 4.2) and the diverse neighbourhood character objectives of the municipality, which is evident in the precinct brochures.

- How the detailed information of the precinct brochures can be included in the planning scheme so that it is taken into consideration in planning applications.

Design considerations

The precinct brochures addressed many detailed design issues that emerged during the course of the Study, as outlined below. While information specific to each precinct is included in the brochures, it is possible that some of the general design considerations that apply throughout the municipality could form part of an updated local policy.

The landscape quality of Darebin

- Landscape quality is an important aspect of all of Darebin's residential areas. There are significant variations in the landscape quality from the northern to the southern parts of the municipality.

- As noted in section 4.3, the soil types of the southern parts of the municipality allow for the growth of a wide range of plant species, including canopy trees. In the north, the clay soils limit the growth of vegetation and there are substantially fewer canopy trees.

- These variations in the scale and type of vegetation and the landscape quality are a significant part of the diversity of character that is evident across the municipality's neighbourhoods.

- In areas where a visible tree canopy is an important characteristic, established trees should be retained and adequate garden space provided at the front and/or rear of buildings for the planting of new canopy trees.

- In areas towards the north, appropriate plant species that are compatible with the soil types should be selected. While canopy trees may be difficult to grow, lower scale trees, shrubs or grasses will nonetheless make an important contribution to the landscape quality.

- Where private garden space is constrained, innovative solutions to providing landscaping should be encouraged. This may also apply to Council's street planting program in some streets.

- While many gardens in Darebin are planted with exotic species, the planting of indigenous species should be encouraged in specific locations including along the creek corridors adjacent to native reserves and grasslands.

Siting of buildings

- New development should respect the existing rhythm of building spacing in the streetscape, which is a defining characteristic of each precinct. Front and side setbacks of new buildings should match the dominant streetscape pattern.

- The garden suburban areas of the central and northern suburbs have a sense of openness due to generally larger lot sizes with a greater amount of space around each dwelling, which is often combined with low scale building forms. In these areas the siting and design of new buildings or extensions should maintain this sense of openness. This could be achieved through requiring side or rear setbacks and planting large scale vegetation in open space areas (where possible given the soil types of the area). In some areas building height will also be a consideration.

- The location of the open space area on a site should not be restricted to the rear, rather it should be determined by the solar orientation of the block as a key consideration.

- Within the inner urban areas lot sizes are often smaller and more compact dwelling types that are achieved through reduced setbacks could be encouraged. Different approaches to landscaping will be required in these areas to maintain the often leafy streetscapes.

Height and form of buildings

- In most precincts it is important that new development respects the height of existing buildings.

- Only in precincts which will experience a degree of change will greater building heights be acceptable. This includes areas that are of a mixed character or identified for housing growth.

- New development should reflect the dominant building form in precincts with a high degree of consistency. Precincts that are more mixed in character could support new development with variations to building form.

- In some precincts pitched roofs are an important part of the established character. Variation in roof pitch between different architectural styles has been addressed in the design guidelines.

- In most precincts upper level setbacks are required so that double storey buildings do not dominate streets that may be characterised by a single storey scale of development.

Car parking

- Car parking structures should be sited and designed to not dominate the street frontage of a building.

- Hard paving for car spaces within frontage setbacks is also not a desirable design outcome as Council has advised that it often leads to the construction of carport structures. Excessive hard paving surfaces will also reduce the permeability of the site and increase storm water run-off

- New crossovers are discouraged where they are not a part of, or would clearly disrupt, the streetscape pattern. In most precincts only one crossover per frontage is recommended.

Lengthways subdivision

- Design guidelines for lengthways subdivision have been included for precincts that display a particular consistency in frontage width. In these instances, multi-dwelling developments are encouraged to adopt the form and spacing of the single dwellings of the street.

Areas of consistent or unique neighbourhood character

- Some precincts, or parts of precincts, show a high degree of consistency in various neighbourhood character elements. These elements often include building height, form and siting, garden style and era of development. Where the Preferred Character Statement envisages this character being preserved, additional policy or controls may be required.

- Eight areas have been identified as potential Neighbourhood Character Overlay areas due to their particularly distinct and intact character.

- Specific controls may be warranted for these areas, should there be adequate support from the community and concern over potential threats to their character.

- The precinct brochures for these areas include additional considerations, namely encouraging the retention of the original dwellings in the streetscape.

Heritage or older buildings

- Specific guidelines for Heritage Overlays have been removed from the brochures, and they will now only address neighbourhood character issues of sites within or adjoining Heritage Overlay areas.

- It is recommended that the State heritage guidelines that are soon to be introduced are used for assessing heritage applications. These are comprehensive guidelines that address all aspects of heritage design and conservation. Council's current heritage work may also see the local heritage policy updated.

- The retention of older dwellings is encouraged where they form a valuable part of the streetscape character and there are a high number of these buildings within the precinct. This is of particular importance within potential Neighbourhood Character Overlay areas.

- The potential to convert larger older dwellings into smaller units should be promoted. This has the advantages of preserving the contribution of the building to the streetscape appearance, as well as re-using an existing building rather than wasting energy and materials on a complete reconstruction. The issue of retaining older dwellings was shown to be of particular importance in much of the community discussion and feedback.

- The description of existing neighbourhood character and the Preferred Character Statement should provide guidance in the design of buildings adjacent to Heritage Overlay sites.

Achieving a high quality of new design

- The aim of the Study is to assist with the site analysis and design response process by articulating local conditions of each part of the municipality and providing guidance on what is the preferred future character of the area.

- Innovative and contemporary design will be encouraged in areas that have experienced significant change, where there is scope for introducing a wider range of architectural responses.

- Outside of Heritage or potential Neighbourhood Character Overlay areas, cultural expression is encouraged, to express the diversity of Darebin's people and environments.

- The potential for new development to create the 'heritage of the future' should be emphasised, rather than a reliance upon recreation of heritage styles. While it may be desirable in some instances to retain older buildings (when this is an

issue for debate outside of Heritage Overlay areas) because they make a contribution to the streetscape character, in other instances allowing new and innovative architecture is also important.

Front boundary treatment

- Low to mid height fences are encouraged as the openness of the streetscape and the visibility of buildings and gardens are considered to be integral aspects of streetscape character in almost every part of the municipality.

- In streets near parklands or the creeks, the planting of private gardens may be encouraged to contribute to the landscape theme of these spaces.

Providing for carefully managed growth within housing opportunity areas

- As envisaged in Council's Housing Distribution Strategy, higher density development should be focussed in these areas which have the greatest access to shops, services and transport.

- More compact dwelling types, such as smaller single dwellings, units or apartments may result in higher scale built form and greater site coverage. In these instances, the design quality of new buildings and the landscape contribution of these sites is of the utmost importance in ensuring that these developments make a positive contribution to streetscape character.

- In addition, there should be minimal impact upon the character of adjacent residential areas.

Creekside environs or areas of natural significance

- For precincts which are adjacent to these areas, specific design guidelines have been included in the brochures.

- These guidelines encourage the use of materials with a 'natural' appearance, i.e. muted colours and non-reflective surfaces.

- Indigenous planting is extremely important for these sites and fencing styles should generally allow a for seemingly uninterrupted flow of landscape across site boundaries wherever possible.

Communication about Character

The focus of a character study is on preparing policies and guidelines for inclusion in the planning scheme. What is sometimes overlooked is the importance of first describing and communicating clearly the preferred character to which applicants should be trying to contribute. Successful communication of this information is an essential first step on the path to delivering better design in residential areas. For this reason, Planisphere has placed a strong emphasis on the content and design of the Precinct Issues Papers and brochures. They are intended to provide essential information to applicants and planning officers, and to look appealing to local residents and others. They are produced in a manner that enables them to be readily copied or otherwise made available at the planning enquiry counter, and other relevant locations.

6. Implementation

6.1	Considerations in Determining the Implementation Approach

Implementation of neighbourhood character strategies can be undertaken using statutory and non-statutory methods and this chapter examines both types. Statutory implementation is perhaps the most important as it legally binds the Council, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and the community to consider neighbourhood character objectives identified through a study such as this.

In considering how to implement the Neighbourhood Character Study the following issues were considered:

- The number and extent of areas that are considered to have distinctive and consistent qualities in a regional and State-wide context.

- The values that the community place upon the existing characteristics of their neighbourhood, and how they would like it to be improved in the future.

- The level of threat to the important characteristics of those areas and the effectiveness of current planning controls in addressing these threats.

- The range of techniques available to strengthen the application of neighbourhood character considerations including statutory and non-statutory mechanisms.

- The best practice approach to implementation of neighbourhood character studies, and the likelihood of the Minister for Planning approving a Planning Scheme Amendment for additional neighbourhood character controls. Planisphere's experience in the preparation and implementation of many other neighbourhood character studies across Melbourne and regional Victoria has been drawn upon in making the recommendations in this report for the City of Darebin.

- How the objectives of the Neighbourhood Character Study relate to Council's Housing Distribution Strategy.

All of these factors have been taken into consideration in developing the recommended approach to statutory implementation of the Darebin Neighbourhood Character Study.

Threats to character

The extent of threats to the important characteristics within each precinct needs to be assessed. Each Preferred Character Statement includes an assessment of the types of threats that are possible, overlaid with an understanding of the development pressures occurring. This was based upon discussion with Councillors, planning staff and the community.

Community values and acceptance

Community values of neighbourhood character have been explored through a number of forums during the course of the study – the workshops, the Community Committee meetings and disposable camera exercise, the display at the Darebin Festival and through written feedback received. Through all of these consultation methods the community have expressed their ideas and thoughts about those elements of neighbourhood character that are valued and to be retained, and those

that they would like to see improved. This community feedback has been summarised in the Precinct Issues Papers.

The likelihood of community acceptance of new controls over some forms of development will relate to the extent of community concern about the loss of particular aspects of the character of the precinct. The acceptability of controls can be assessed during the preparation of the study, through discussions with Councillors, planning officers and community representatives, however the ultimate test is the exhibition of any planning scheme Amendment.

Existing Planning Scheme controls

Strategies, policies and controls affecting neighbourhood character already contained in the Darebin Planning Scheme need to be considered in determining the implementation options. The strategic context has been examined in section 2 of this report, and the existing planning controls of the Darebin Planning Scheme are examined in the following pages, in section 6.2.

Whether the existing planning scheme policies and controls are able to protect the distinctive qualities of each precinct from the identified threats/pressure for change will determine implementation options.

Directions for DSE and Planning Panels

Gaining and understanding of the current best practice approach to implementation is vital in determining the recommendations for this Study. This has been undertaken by way of discussion with the DSE, examination of Practice Notes and consideration of the outcomes of Planning Panels for other neighbourhood character studies. The results of this investigation is detailed in section 6.3.

Likelihood of approval

The likelihood of approval of any planning scheme Amendment to introduce statutory controls by an independent State government appointed planning panel and the Minister for Planning is an important consideration. There is little point in recommending measures to the Council that are unlikely to be approved. The most important aspect of this consideration is the need to determine which parts of the study area require additional planning controls and those which can be successfully managed with existing controls and the range of other non-statutory implementation techniques available.

There are, however, other contextual issues that must be considered such as State policy and directives, and issues raised previously by panels in making recommendations on other similar planning scheme Amendments. A planning panel will also examine all of the above issues in their deliberation about a planning scheme Amendment. Discussion about some issues raised by previous planning panels is included throughout this report.

Non statutory implementation

This is also an important part of the implementation program. Amongst other issues, it deals with implementation of neighbourhood character objectives within the public realm spaces. This is detailed in section 6.6.

Relationship to Council's Housing Distribution Strategy

As discussed in Section 2, Council's Housing Distribution Strategy has broadly identified suitable locations for housing growth, being within and around activity centres, along transport spines and on Strategic Redevelopment Sites. On this basis, it will eventually be possible to justify limiting the level of change in other parts of the municipality so that particular neighbourhood character or heritage qualities can be preserved. In proposing additional planning scheme controls that restrict the future housing opportunities of an area, Council must be able to demonstrate precisely the locations where housing can be provided and the capacity of these opportunity areas to meet housing projections.

Existing Planning Scheme Controls

Zoning

The study area is mostly included in the Residential 1 Zone of the Darebin Planning Scheme. This is the standard residential zone throughout most of Victoria. One objective of the zone is:

> "To encourage residential development that respects neighbourhood character."

Several precincts within Reservoir, Thornbury Preston and Northcote are included in the Mixed Use Zone which, in addition to the above objective, also has the objective

> "To provide for a range of residential, commercial, industrial and other uses which complement the mixed-use function of the locality."

ResCode

The introduction of the residential provisions collectively known as ResCode in 2001, has meant that neighbourhood character is now the mandatory starting point in the assessment of planning applications. ResCode offers a range of tools for the protection of neighbourhood character that would be applicable to all applications within residential areas, in relation to those siting and design issues that are not addressed by other controls such as the Design and Development Overlay or the Heritage Overlay.

These tools can enable protection of existing character or encouragement of a preferred neighbourhood character determined by Council. The introduction of these tools into Councils' planning schemes requires a proper amendment process. The ResCode tools for the protection of neighbourhood character include:

- Zone provisions
- Schedule to the Residential Zones to introduce varied ResCode standards
- Local Planning Policy
- Overlays, in particular the Neighbourhood Character Overlay which can be used to vary ResCode standards.

The ResCode standards at Clauses 54 (construction of one dwelling on a lot) and 55, (construction of two or more dwellings on a lot and residential buildings) are the main tools that apply to neighbourhood character. There are many references to respecting neighbourhood character and local policy in the ResCode standards and these would require consideration of this study in determining applications.

The ResCode standards address broad neighbourhood character and design response issues, energy efficiency, car parking, protection of amenity and detailed building design elements such as façade articulation and roof form. In some instances ResCode standards relating to building heights, front and side setbacks, front fences or materials may be over-ridden by the provisions of overlay controls that apply to parts of the study area.

Councils are able to alter six of the ResCode standards to address neighbourhood character issues particular to their municipality. These standards relate to private open space, street setbacks, side and rear setbacks, site coverage, building height and front fencing. Councils are also able to specify that a permit is required for a development on a lot less than 500m^2. Darebin has not sought any variation to the standards.

Overlays

There are a number of existing overlay controls in the Darebin planning scheme that apply to different parts of the City for a range of reasons. Several of these have particular relevance to the implementation context of the Neighbourhood Character Study as they impact directly upon the built environment and design: the Heritage Overlay; the Design and Development Overlay; the Development Plan Overlay; the Environmental Significance Overlay and the Vegetation Protection Overlay.

The relevance of each overlay and the impact upon the implementation choices for this study are outlined as follows. In all of these instances, relevant precinct brochures and design guidelines are in accordance with the objectives and requirements of the overlay.

Heritage Overlay (HO)

The HO applies to numerous sites and precincts throughout Darebin. The Schedule to the overlay in the planning scheme contains a total of 176 entries, comprising both individual properties and precincts. Council is planning to undertake further investigation of the municipality and this may result in additional heritage sites or precincts included in the overlay.

As previously noted, Heritage Overlay areas were included in the Study as a means of comparison between all residential areas across the municipality and between this study and the 1998 study. The recommendations of this study are that Heritage Overlay areas are not included in a local neighbourhood character policy.

Design and Development Overlay (DDO)

There are several DDOs in the Darebin planning scheme that may influence the outcomes of the study.

Schedule 1 to the DDO, Central Creek Grasslands Residential Area north of Davidson Street and Schedule 2 to the DDO, Central Creek Grasslands Residential Area north of Bartrop Street, both seek to ensure that dwellings reflect their interface with the Central Creek Grasslands. The DDOs include specifications on building heights, setbacks and fences. They are located within precincts H4 and G4 respectively.

Schedule 3 to the DDO, The Junction Area, applies to residential and commercial sites at the junction of High Street and Plenty Road. While this area is excluded from

this study, its future urban form will have an impact upon adjoining residential precincts (B4 and D3).

Schedule 4 to the DDO, 2-2A High Street Northcote, addresses design issues for this key site which is located within precinct A4. Considerations include the interface with adjoining residential properties and the creek. The height of buildings is limited to retain the dominance of the tree canopy and use of building materials with a 'natural' finish is encouraged.

Schedule 5 to the DDO, High Street Corridor View Protection, seeks to protect important views to the north, south and east from elevated areas along High Street, up to All Nations Park. Height limits of 8-12 metres apply. This DDO affects mostly commercial properties, however some residential areas in precincts A2 and C2 are included.

Development Plan Overlay (DPO)

There are three DPOs that are of importance to the study.

Schedule 3 to the DPO, Mount Cooper, includes all of precinct H5. It includes a comprehensive list of requirements relating to building siting and design, the desired landscape character of the precinct and local access.

Schedule 4 to the DPO, Central Creek, affects the same area as DDO1 and outlines the requirements for future subdivision. Importantly, it seeks to provide for a diversity of housing type and design, protect the interface with the creek and native grasslands and provide appropriate landscaping treatments to new streets.

Schedule 9 to the DPO, Former Thornbury/Darebin Secondary College, sets out the requirements for a development plan for the redevelopment of the school site. This includes addressing the sensitive interfaces with adjoining residential areas and the Darebin Creek, site landscaping, energy efficient design and pedestrian or vehicular access and movement around the site. A plan has been approved for medium density housing.

Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO)

Schedule 1 to the ESO, Merri Creek and Environs, seeks to improve the environmental quality of the creek corridor. A permit is required for buildings over 6 metres and decision guidelines include consideration of the height, bulk and appearance of buildings, the removal of vegetation and the landscape quality of the area. There are a number of strategies that must be consulted.

Schedule 2 to the ESO, Darebin Creek and Environs, has similar objectives to ESO1. A permit is also required for buildings over 6 metres.

Both schedules include in their decision guidelines consideration of 'the extent that the proposed buildings or works are designed to enhance or promote the environmental values of the creek and the visual character of the creek corridor'.

Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO)

Schedule 3 to the VPO, Mount Cooper, seeks to retain the landscape quality and significant vegetation of the area. It requires a permit for removal of vegetation of identified significance.

Directions from DSE & Planning Panels

DSE Advice

Planisphere holds discussions with relevant officers from the Department of Sustainability and Environment from time to time in order to obtain the most up to date advice regarding departmental opinion and requirements.

The DSE has advised that local policy cannot be used to substitute alternate ResCode provisions, and that it should not repeat the provisions of ResCode or other requirements of the planning scheme. It is the intention of the DSE that should alternate ResCode provisions be proposed, an appropriate overlay or schedule to the residential zone should be utilised, provided there is sufficient justification.

The DSE has also stressed that numeric standards cannot be included in policy or reference documents, rather they must be specified within the provisions of zone or overlay schedules.

The DSE has recently approved the Bayside neighbourhood character amendment with a Local Policy in a format that could be used for reference.

Practice Notes and Advisory Notes

Understanding Neighbourhood Character (General Practice Note, 2001)

The DSE issued this Practice Note to provide general information about neighbourhood character to assist in the preparation and assessment of residential development applications. Specifically, it addresses the matters to be considered in implementing the provisions of ResCode that require regard for the surrounding neighbourhood character.

The Practice Note provides a list of elements of the surrounding neighbourhood that may be of relevance to the preparation of a neighbourhood and site description plan and design response. In so doing, it provides some indication of the types of characteristics of an area that should be identified in a character study. It is by no means definitive nor exhaustive in this regard.

Using the Neighbourhood Character Provisions in Planning Schemes (VPP Practice Note, 2004)

The DSE Practice Note 'Using the Neighbourhood Character Provisions in Planning Schemes' provides general information on preparing and implementing a neighbourhood character study.

The Practice Note discusses the provisions that must be considered in any planning application in a residential zone under the VPPs, as well as additional tools that can be introduced into the planning scheme to achieve local objectives.

It also discusses the relationship between implementing neighbourhood character controls and addressing local housing objectives.

Applying the Residential 3 Zone (Advisory Note, 2004)

This Advisory Note provides information about the provisions of the Residential 3 Zone and its schedules, and how it can be introduced into planning schemes.

Writing a Local Planning Policy (VPP Practice Note, 1999)

The 'Writing a Local Planning Policy' Practice Note details the role of planning policy within the structure of the planning scheme. It states that policies should 'cascade' down from broad level policy to the location specific details of local policy or planning controls, and that local policy must not repeat the objectives or requirements that have already been articulated in the State Planning Policy Framework or MSS.

Incorporated and Reference Documents (VPP Practice Note, 2000)

The 'Incorporated and Reference Documents' Practice Note explains the role of these documents that are external to the planning scheme, as outlined in the previous section.

Planning Panel Reports

A number of planning scheme amendments have been undertaken by other Councils to incorporate neighbourhood character objectives within the planning scheme. Planning panels, established to hear submissions regarding the amendments and make recommendations to the Council about the submissions and the suitability of the amendment, have been held in most cases. The views of Planning Panels Victoria are reflected in planning panel reports, which provide a useful source of information in the research of best practice neighbourhood character management.

Two previous panel reports, for neighbourhood character planning scheme amendments in the Cities of Knox and Banyule, have highlighted the importance of addressing the strategic context of neighbourhood character. In particular the reports have highlighted the need to establish the relationship between the proposed neighbourhood character objectives and the State planning objectives for housing, and ensuring that the Council's MSS contains strategic rationale for character policy. A recent planning panel for the Frankston Amendment C24 reiterated the need to link housing and neighbourhood character outcomes in approving the proposed amendment.

Where provisions other than a local policy are proposed, such as overlay controls or changes to the residential zone schedule, the Banyule decision also highlighted the need to demonstrate that the provisions of ResCode combined with a local policy on character, were not adequate. It is of particular importance to demonstrate that single dwellings are of equal or greater concern in achieving neighbourhood character objectives, than medium density housing, as policy can influence decisions in any case where a planning permit is required.

Panel reports and subsequent DSE decisions regarding amendments affecting Ocean Grove and Hedgeley Dene in the City of Stonnington highlight that the implementation of Neighbourhood Character Overlay controls will only be considered over small, discreet and highly justified areas with clear neighbourhood character objectives, and under demonstrated threat.

Lastly, any amendment should ensure proper use of the VPP tools in line with practice advice from the DSE. Also, boundaries proposed to delineate precincts or overlay areas should be carefully considered and consistently applied, as should the terminology used to describe proposed precincts or overlay areas.

Links to Local Housing Strategy

It is vital in any planning scheme amendment proposing the introduction of policies regarding neighbourhood character to assess the potential impact of these policies on the achievement of the State government and Council's housing objectives.

In some instances, restrictive controls may only be applied where the extent and capacity of housing opportunity areas have been mapped in detail. This may relate to restrictive controls proposed for areas in proximity to activity centres where housing growth is expected to occur, or to proposals for large areas of development restriction, such as the application of the Residential 3 Zone, or a large number of Neighbourhood Character Overlays.

Experiences with planning panels have shown that a clear and concise way of demonstrating that the proposed policies or controls will not unreasonably limit residential development within a municipality is by coordinating a neighbourhood character study with housing strategy policy. During the preparation of this study, Darebin's participation with the Regional Housing Working Group process and draft Housing Distribution Strategy have both shown that housing projections will be adequately met by the housing opportunity areas that have been broadly identified to date.

6.2 Outline of statutory options

The statutory options in implementing neighbourhood character strategies range from a minimalist 'guideline' approach to a highly regulatory approach involving the implementation of the study through the planning scheme.

Having regard to the statutory framework within which the recommendations of the study must be implemented (as outlined in this section and section 2), there are several possibilities for the implementation of neighbourhood character objectives within the development control system.

Many of these options, listed below, can be used together, however each requires individual consideration:

- Adopt the Study , including the brochures and guidelines as a Council guideline only, with no formal statutory weight.

- Alter the MSS in the planning scheme to include elements from the Study .

- Incorporate the entire Study into the planning scheme at Clause 81 (Incorporated Document).

- Refer to the document in the planning scheme (Reference Document).

- Extract parts of the Study , brochures and guidelines to form a local policy in the planning scheme (Clause 22 in the Local Planning Policy Framework).

- Implement parts of the design guidelines for particular areas warranting additional protection through an overlay control.

- Amend the schedule to the Residential 1 Zone, thereby affecting the entire municipality.

- Include a part of the municipality within the Residential 3 zone, for which a separate ResCode schedule could be drafted.

The advantages and disadvantages of each of these options, having regard to existing controls in the Darebin Planning Scheme and the experiences of other Councils in the implementation of neighbourhood character and housing objectives, are summarised below:

Council guideline

This option suggests that the Council resolve to adopt the findings of the study and the brochures and guidelines for use in the assessment of planning applications, but not to proceed further with amending the planning scheme. The advantages of this option are:

- The Council could commence using the guidelines immediately.

- The Council would have the ability to change the guidelines as it wishes.

- No planning scheme amendment would be required.

The significant disadvantage is that the study will not be of assistance at VCAT as the study, brochures or guidelines will not be considered to be of relevance to the consideration of applications without some reference in the planning scheme. The Department of Sustainability and Environment actively discourages stand-alone Council policies. Other than as a temporary measure while an amendment was being prepared and exhibited this option would not be recommended.

Municipal Strategic Statement

The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) is the Council's primary statutory tool, and it must provide the strategic rationale and context for all statutory controls introduced into the Darebin Planning Scheme. Reference to this Study should be included in the MSS, and it should provide the overarching objectives relating to the protection and management of neighbourhood character in the municipality. It is recommended that the MSS is also amended to include reference to the link between neighbourhood character and housing provision.

There are only advantages in ensuring that the MSS contains the correct strategy to provide an umbrella to all other related provisions.

Incorporated Documents

In this option the whole or part of the study, brochures and/or guidelines are incorporated into the planning scheme and become a statutory document. The whole incorporated document therefore has statutory weight, and this may be considered an advantage in some situations.

The disadvantage of this approach is that a planning scheme amendment process is required to change any part of the incorporated document. This is cumbersome and time consuming, therefore the contents of the incorporated document must be relatively 'timeless' and not contain information that might become irrelevant or out-of-date readily. This would apply to parts of the brochures and guidelines.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment Practice Note on incorporated and reference documents discourages the incorporation of documents that contain criteria, performance measures or decision guidelines. This has been reiterated in recent discussions with the DSE and it is unlikely such a proposal would be

supported. Rather, the DSE require that the key elements of the study, brochures and guidelines be included in local policy and zone provisions, or possibly overlay control schedules where relevant.

Reference Documents

This option involves including a reference to this report and the precinct brochures in the planning scheme (eg in the MSS or Local Policies), thus they would be known as 'reference documents'. The advantage of this option is that it provides some statutory weight to the study at VCAT. However, the Department of Sustainability and Environment advice on reference documents is that they are to be considered as background only and, similar to incorporated documents, should not contain policies or guidelines that assist in determining upon planning applications. Notwithstanding this, referencing of the study and guidelines is a sound and proper approach in conjunction with other statutory implementation mechanisms.

The current neighbourhood character study and brochures are included in the planning scheme as a reference document. Council planners have advised that this approach is working well and adequately meeting the needs of both Council and the community in managing neighbourhood character.

Local Policy

The inclusion of a local policy within the Local Planning Policy Framework (LPPF) provides the highest level of strategic direction, next to the MSS itself, and therefore ensures the Council's objectives and the measures against which all applications will be assessed are clear.

Generally speaking, successful amendments in recent years have taken one of two approaches to developing local neighbourhood character policies.

The first approach is the introduction of a local planning policy that contains content based predominantly on the neighbourhood character study, including character descriptions, preferred character statements and guidelines. In most cases these local planning policies have adapted the information contained in brochures to avoid lengthiness and repetition and to remove references to numeric values. Some councils, such as Knox, have opted to group neighbourhoods by character typologies and include general sets of existing characteristics, preferred character statements, and design guidelines, while others, such as Bayside, have included a preferred future character statement and set of design guidelines for every precinct.

The second approach is the combination of Housing Strategy and Neighbourhood Character Study content in order to achieve the dual outcomes of managing change within residential areas and delivering on the Regional Housing Statement / Melbourne 2030 housing aspirations. This generally involves working within a framework of designating different residential areas for minimal, incremental or substantial degrees of change.

There have been varied approaches to this framework in recent years.

- The City of Whitehorse Residential Development Policy has listed character typologies (such as 'bush suburban' or 'garden suburban') under each degree of change (substantial, natural and minimal) and then provided detailed guidance extracted from the Neighbourhood Character Study brochures.

- The City of Kingston in their Residential Development Policy has identified the type of development to be encouraged under each degree of change (such as single or multi-dwellings). Broad neighbourhood character policy statements for the entire municipality are then set out.

- The City Glen Eira has a Housing Diversity Area Policy and a Minimal Change Area Policy. Higher density development will be accommodated in the housing diversity areas, which include activity centres, with the remainder of the residential areas experiencing minimal change. The policies describe the preferred types of housing and detail neighbourhood character aspirations. The Minimal Change Area Policy discourages development of greater density than dual occupancy.

- The City of Bayside has a recently approved Neighbourhood Character Policy (2006) that includes Preferred Character Statements and Objectives, Design Responses and Avoid guidelines for each precinct.

Given that Council has initiated work on the Local Housing Distribution Strategy, it would be ideal if a Local Planning Policy could effectively combine the outcomes of the two studies and ensure direct and clear links between their respective intentions and recommendations.

Zoning and ResCode Schedules

ResCode is important in that it requires neighbourhood character to be addressed in planning applications as a fundamental consideration, along with any relevant study, such as this.

As noted, Councils are now able to include a schedule with residential zones to alter six of the standards, as well as require a planning permit for a building on a site less than 500m^2. The changes would apply to single dwellings under the Building Act, as well as medium density housing and single dwellings for which a planning permit is required. Many Councils have introduced variations to the ResCode standards.

The DSE Practise Note 'Using the Neighbourhood Character Provisions in Planning Schemes' states that the standards should only be varied where it can be demonstrated that the existing controls of ResCode, coupled with other relevant planning tools or policy, are not adequate in achieving the desired neighbourhood character outcomes of a municipality. The Practice Note states that an evidence based approach is required to demonstrate the necessity of these amended standards.

The limitation of ResCode in achieving the recommendations of this study is that the provisions apply uniformly to all residential zones in a municipality, with no capacity to alter the standards between different residential areas, aside from those areas where a Neighbourhood Character Overlay might apply. Therefore, only those neighbourhood character objectives that are general of nature and are relevant to all areas could be implemented through a variation to ResCode standards.

This study has shown that there are wide variations in neighbourhood character between the first established, inner urban areas in the south of the municipality and the more recent garden suburban precincts extending to the north. As a result, variations to the standards would not be relevant to all parts of the municipality.

Residential 3 Zone

The Residential 3 Zone was introduced in 2004 to allow height controls and an alternate ResCode schedule to be applied to all (or large areas) of a municipality's residential areas. It replicates the provisions of the Residential 1 Zone, with the exception of a mandatory maximum height of 9 metres (or 10 metres for sloping sites). These heights are only listed as *preferred* heights in the general ResCode standards.

The Residential 3 Zone has a separate ResCode schedule to that of the Residential 1 Zone and the provisions of the schedule can be varied in the same way as the Residential 1 Zone schedule. Therefore, within the Residential 3 Zone, different amenity or neighbourhood character issues can be addressed to those of the Residential 1 Zone.

The DSE Practice Note 'Applying the Residential 3 Zone' states that it must be demonstrated that maintaining a lower building height is necessary to protect existing neighbourhood character, and that the majority of existing buildings fall under the 9 metre height limit. The Practice Note states that to introduce the Residential 3 Zone and any schedule variations, a Council must demonstrate that the standard Residential 1 Zone provisions, in conjunction with other planning controls, are not sufficient to achieve desired neighbourhood character outcomes. The Practice Note does not give direction on the detailed evidence required to introduce changes to the ResCode schedule via the Residential 3 Zone. However, the Practice Note on 'Using the Neighbourhood Character Provisions in Planning Schemes' states that an evidence based approach will be necessary to support such an amendment.

In order to implement the Residential 3 Zone, a Council would need to ascertain community acceptance for this height limitation, and any other schedule changes. A Council must also be able to demonstrate that this additional level of control will not affect its ability to meet housing projections. It is therefore only an option for consideration where the Council's housing strategy demonstrates the capacity of different parts of the municipality for the provision of new housing, be it in terms of minimal change or more substantial change.

To date, two municipalities - the Cities of Kingston and Knox - have introduced the Residential 3 Zone to a large proportion of their residential areas, and Manningham is currently exhibiting an amendment to do so. All three municipalities have completed neighbourhood character studies showing that the affected residential areas are characterised by low height development, and that this is an important characteristic to maintain. They also have completed their respective housing strategies to a point where they are able to clearly demonstrate how their housing need projections will be met, and define areas or sites that can accommodate a greater degree of change.

Both Kingston and Knox have introduced variations to the ResCode standards for the Residential 1 and Residential 3 Zones. These relate to reducing the maximum site coverage and increasing the minimum amount of private open space required. Kingston has additional requirements for open space for developments with two or more bedrooms. The Panel report discussing the changes to the Residential 1 Zone for Knox did not support these amendments, which were based on both neighbourhood character, environmental and amenity grounds, due to lack of empirical evidence. As the introduction of the Residential 3 Zone for both of these municipalities was via a Ministerial Amendment, there are no Panel reports available.

Design and Development Overlay

A Design and Development Overlay (DDO) requires that a permit be obtained for all development within the area covered (some types of development can be exempted). It ensures the implementation of the detailed guidelines in the consideration of all development in that area. A DDO can control, by permit, elements such as height, setback, site coverage, fences and development within certain distance of tree trunks.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment has advised that the use of DDOs for the sole purpose of neighbourhood character implementation is not encouraged. However, DDOs are considered appropriate for areas where mandatory height limits are warranted, or change is encouraged and no other mechanism would achieve the desired outcome.

The DDO should only apply to small areas where a high degree of change is anticipated and specific design outcomes are desired. This may be applicable to areas around Activity Centres or along the transport corridors identified in the MSS for higher density housing, or to large redevelopment sites.

Neighbourhood Character Overlay

The Neighbourhood Character Overlay (NCO) was introduced at the same time as ResCode to implement specific design objectives for small areas of distinct neighbourhood character. In proposing an NCO, it must be clearly demonstrated that the provisions of ResCode or local policy will not achieve the desired future character for the area. It must also be shown that there is general support amongst the community for the additional controls. A detailed understanding of what the community value about the area would need to be gained through targeted consultation, and this would inform the scope and content of the proposed controls.

The NCO enables control over most buildings and works. Therefore, a greater level of control is offered in relation to the fundamental neighbourhood character considerations such as building height, form and setbacks, as well as more detailed issues such as colour and material selection and vegetation removal.

The specific features of this control are:

- Changes to ResCode standards can be made, which apply only to that particular NCO area. Many of the ResCode standards can be varied through application of the NCO, potentially in some detail.

- Requires consideration of a *Statement of Neighbourhood Character* which would include the description and preferred character statement that have been drafted for each SCA.

- Requires an application to be tested against decision guidelines that are specific to the NCO area.

- Demolition controls work only as a 'stay' until plans for the replacement dwelling/s are approved.

- Does not include controls for fencing.

- The tree controls are limited to trees over 5m in height.

- It can apply only to small, well-defined areas where there is strong justification for additional controls of this nature.

- There is no ability to exempt certain types of development (eg single dwellings or buildings under a certain height), other than outbuildings and swimming pools. Therefore all buildings in the overlay area will require a planning permit. This potentially places a great administrative burden upon the Council wherever the overlay is applied.

Where a proposed NCO specifies detailed schedule requirements, such as numeric values applying to building heights or setbacks, this must be thoroughly supported through a detailed site survey of existing conditions.

To date, only three NCOs have been implemented in metropolitan Melbourne: Hedgeley Dene, Stonnington; VFL Park, Waverley and the Blackburn Lakes area, Whitehorse. However, use of the NCO has been seriously considered by a number of Councils and some are undertaking the necessary steps to introduce NCO areas, following completion of their neighbourhood character studies.

Vegetation Protection Overlay and Significant Landscape Overlay

A Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO) or Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) can require a permit for removal of trees; and it can apply to all trees, trees over a certain trunk diameter or height or to any of native, indigenous or exotic vegetation. The only limitation is the ease of use and enforcement of the provisions. In order for a VPO or SLO to be justifiable, the vegetation or landscape must be demonstrated to be of significance to the character of the area.

The VPO is primarily aimed at situations where the vegetation itself is of significance. The VPO can only require a permit for vegetation removal, and not for buildings and works. It is preferable that VPO controls be confirmed by a parallel study that identifies the environmental significance of vegetation. A Vegetation Protection Overlay is therefore not recommended by this report, as this study has considered only the aesthetic contribution of the vegetation, not the environmental significance.

The SLO has the distinct advantage of providing the opportunity to control the type of vegetation, the types of buildings and works and fences that require a permit, as necessary.

6.3 Conclusions: outline and approach to statutory implementation

Implementation options for the Neighbourhood Character Study must take into consideration a range of factors.

In the first instance, the existing and preferred character of the area must be examined, as well as what the particular threats to that character may be. The neighbourhood character elements that are particularly valued by the community and the aspects of character that the community would like to see retained or improved are an important part of establishing the preferred character.

Recommendations for implementation will then need to consider the current level of planning control applicable to each part of the municipality and how effective it might be in achieving the preferred character for each precinct, addressing the threats to character and meeting community expectations.

As a part of this consideration an understanding of the best practice approach to implementation of neighbourhood character studies is necessary. DSE will also require Council to have given serious consideration to how implementation of neighbourhood character policy or controls will affect Council's ability to achieve M2030 housing projections.

Finally, there are many non-statutory implementation options that will be an integral part of the successful operation of the study outcomes and will complement the statutory implementation measures.

The statutory implementation measures available are:

- *Adoption of the Study as a Council Guideline.* This is not recommended as it will have no statutory weight.

- *Changes to MSS to include the overall aims and objectives of the Study.* This is an important aspect of any approach to statutory implementation as it would include the recommendations of the Study as part of the strategic direction for the municipality.

- *Inclusion of the Study in the Planning Scheme, in whole or in part, as an Incorporated Document.* This is a potential option for implementation but would require more detailed discussion with the DSE as it is not a standard approach. It may also be considered too limiting or binding, given the requirement for a Planning Scheme Amendment to change any aspect of the incorporated elements of the Study.

- *Inclusion of the Study as a Reference Document.* This is a viable option for implementation, however it will not provide a high level of statutory weight as other implementation measures. It may be effective accompanied by a detailed and comprehensive Local Policy on neighbourhood character.

- *Inclusion of the key elements of the Study as Local Policy.* This is an essential component of all implementation measures. Inclusion of a new Local Policy for neighbourhood character is also an opportunity to integrate Council's objectives for housing provision.

- *Overlay controls for areas of significant neighbourhood character.* These may be required where the siting or design of single dwellings is of concern, and additional, more detailed control over multi-dwellings is considered necessary. They may also be applied to areas of vegetation or landscape significance.

- *Changes to ResCode standards of the Residential 1 Zone or application of the Residential 3 Zone.* Application of the Residential 3 Zone would introduce an alternative ResCode schedule. The ResCode standards of each zone would apply to *all* land affected by the zone as variations to the standards within the zone are not permissible. To introduce these schedule variations or the Residential 3 Zone, Council would need to demonstrate that the current planning provisions are failing to meet neighbourhood character objectives and that there is community acceptance for additional planning controls.

6.4   Statutory Implementation Recommendations

There are a number of actions that should be taken to improve the guidance provided to all parties involved in the development approvals process within the study area. These actions will collectively assist applicants to design more

sympathetic buildings and ensure protection of the area's significant characteristics. They will enable residents of the area, Council officers and Councillors to assess the suitability of development proposals and, where necessary, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal members to determine upon planning appeal cases.

Recommendations have been developed through exploring the various options with Council planning staff and the DSE. All of these actions will require an amendment to the Darebin Planning Scheme. This process is likely to take a minimum of six months.

Aims

The aims of the statutory approach should be:

- To give the whole study recognition within the planning scheme, as an important background document.

- To provide appropriate strategic direction and 'triggers' within the MSS, to give an umbrella for policy and controls.

- To enable the design guidelines developed for each precinct in the study area to be used as an assessment tool for all applications.

- To ensure the preferred future character statements are contained within the planning scheme.

- To ensure that, where necessary, additional statutory controls are provided to protect areas of unique character.

MSS

- The MSS should be amended at Clause 21.05, Objectives-Strategies-Implementation, to include the updated Study and brochures as reference documents and to remove reference in the implementation actions to updating the 1998 study.

- Council may consider updating Clause 21.03, Key Influences and Issues, with summary points from the key study findings detailed in section 4.3 *The Character of Darebin* and section 5.3 *Key Character Issues.*

Local Policy

Urban Character Policy - Clause 22.04

- It is recommended that the Urban Character Policy at Clause 22.04 is amended to include the Preferred Character Statements for each precinct, to ensure that the most important part of the brochures are given statutory effect.

- It is also recommended that the design objectives and design responses of the precinct brochures are included in the Local Policy, as well as the Preferred Character Statements.

- There are a number of options for the final format of the Policy, as explained in the previous section. The design objectives and design responses could be included for each precinct, grouped according to the eight Character Area Types or general design objectives and responses drafted that apply to the entire municipality. Alternatively, a combination of these approaches may be required so that common design objectives and responses are grouped, and then

detailed requirements for Character Area Types or precincts stated. The best format will be determined upon drafting the Local Policy and discussion with Council planners and the DSE.

- Inclusion of the design objectives and responses in the Local Policy has the benefit of giving the guidelines greater statutory weight in the planning scheme than as a reference document. As noted, this approach has been successfully applied to other neighbourhood character studies that Planisphere has recently undertaken and is the recommended approach for Darebin.

- Discussions with Council staff have indicated that there is a preference for including only general aspects of the study in Local Policy that would apply to all residential areas, in the manner of the current Urban Character Policy. The design responses and objectives for each precinct would be included in the planning scheme only as a reference document. Should Council prefer this approach, the general policy directions of Clause 22.04-3 that apply to all precincts should be updated to include reference to additional design elements addressed in the brochures that are currently not included in the Urban Character Policy. These additional design elements are: consideration of heritage issues for sites adjoining a Heritage Overlay; retention of older dwellings where relevant; allowing adequate space for landscaping; encouraging architectural innovation and a high standard of design quality; and use of appropriate materials.

- Council may also wish to include the updated precinct map (formerly included in the MSS) as a part of this policy.

- The Study and the brochures should be included as a reference document to the policy.

- Upon completion of Council's Housing Distribution Study, it may be appropriate to include a housing statement for each precinct within the Local Policy. This would clearly link the outcomes of the housing strategy and the Neighbourhood Character Study at a precinct level.

- The policy should be renamed to reflect the title of the study/studies that have informed it, as well as its scope and application. For example, it could be renamed the Neighbourhood Character Policy or the Housing and Neighbourhood Character Policy.

Residential Zones

Given the wide variations in character type across the Residential 1 Zone, it is not recommended that changes are made to the ResCode standards for this zone schedule.

It is possible that Council could investigate the need to introduce the Residential 3 Zone to existing residential areas generally to the north of Bell Street, where building height appears to be consistently single or double storey and retaining the existing sense of space around buildings is particularly important. The following issues have been identified in relation to the introduction of a Residential 3 Zone over part of the City:

- In order to introduce this variation Council would need to demonstrate that the current provisions of ResCode, when used in conjunction with an updated Local Policy as recommended as a part of this Study, are insufficient to achieve the desired neighbourhood character outcomes. It is therefore recommended that Council use the updated Local Policy and study brochures for a period of twelve

months to ascertain whether this method is effective in achieving the neighbourhood character objectives of the different precincts.

- The site surveys, community feedback and discussion with Council planners did not indicate that there are particular and immediate threats to neighbourhood character in terms of building height or spacing. However, if in the future it can be demonstrated that new applications for development – for both single and multi-dwellings - are posing a threat to achieving the preferred character of particular areas, then Council may wish to investigate the introduction of the Residential 3 Zone with variations to the schedule for provision of space around dwellings. This could be achieved through changes to the provisions relating to side and rear setbacks, site coverage or open space requirements.

- While some of the feedback from the community indicated that a single storey scale is preferred, the Residential 3 Zone does not prevent construction of two storey buildings. Rather, it is the aim of this study and the precinct brochures to see improvement of the design quality of double storey buildings so that their potential impact upon local character and amenity is reduced. Concern over building height also appeared to relate more to the height of new development within commercial areas or activity centres.

- Feedback was received from the community during this Study about increasing minimum open space standards, particularly in relation to multi-dwelling developments of a higher number of bedrooms. Council may determine that the open space requirements for whole or part of the municipality should be increased in relation to amenity, in additional to neighbourhood character concerns.

- Application of a Residential 3 Zone would not be appropriate for *all* residential areas north of Bell Street. The Council would need to identify areas of change, particularly around the Reservoir Activity Centre, prior to applying this zone and exclude new subdivisions, areas of substantial slope or areas where higher buildings may not be of concern.

In summary, introduction of the Residential 3 Zone would require Council to demonstrate that:

- ResCode and the current planning controls and policies are failing to meet neighbourhood character objectives.

- existing buildings within the area are mostly under 9 metres in height.

- an empirical assessment of setbacks, site coverage or open space provision has been undertaken to support revision of numerical ResCode standards.

- there is community acceptance for increased planning control.

- Council's housing projections can still be met.

Areas of potential heritage or character significance

A number of areas have been identified as having significant neighbourhood character or potential heritage significance.

Heritage investigation areas

Several areas or groups of buildings were identified during the surveys as having potential heritage significance. This relates to:

- Several streets adjoining existing Heritage Overlay Areas within the A and B Character Areas. It is uncertain whether these streets should be included in an extension to the Heritage Overlay or, if not of heritage significance, whether they should be protected with a Neighbourhood Character Overlay.

- Individual sites within the C Character Areas. While the character of these areas is too mixed to support the NCO or probably Heritage Overlay areas, individual sites or small pockets of heritage buildings were observed.

It is recommended that Council proceeds with its heritage assessment program so that areas of potential significance are identified. Should the Heritage Overlay be applicable it is considered that this should be pursued first as it offers the highest level of protection for this type of area and is more appropriate.

Potential Neighbourhood Character Overlay areas

Eight discreet areas with a particularly distinct neighbourhood character were identified, as shown on the map and listed in the table included as Appendix 8. These areas were identified as they have a particularly consistent or unique neighbourhood character. The key elements of each area that create this special character are listed in the Appendix.

Application of the Neighbourhood Character Overlay is an option that Council may wish to consider in the future, should it be determined that this level of additional control is necessary. In Planisphere's experience of implementing neighbourhood character controls, whether or not an NCO is required will depend on a combination of factors:

- The neighbourhood character significance of the area.

- The level of threat to the area's character from inappropriate development or removal of vegetation. Existing inappropriate development may be an indicator of potential threats.

- The effectiveness of current planning controls, namely ResCode, Local Policy and reference documents, in protecting this character. To seek additional planning controls it must be demonstrated that these are not adequate in protecting the significant neighbourhood character elements of the area.

- The value placed on the area by the community, the level of concern amongst the community about potential threats to neighbourhood character and whether there is support for a greater level of planning control.

From the site surveys conducted and discussion with Council planners, it appears that the level of threat to these areas is currently low.

In addition, as it is possible that these areas are of heritage significance, it is recommended that Council conducts a heritage assessment prior to proposing NCOs. As the Heritage Overlay is the 'higher order' planning control there is no point in undertaking amendments for NCOs when an area may actually have heritage significance.

Five areas comprising State Bank/Housing Commission estates, of particularly consistent neighbourhood character were identified. Given that Council's Heritage Overlay includes one such area, it may be considered desirable to establish a possible change in the character of these areas. This would allow the relatively large sites of these areas to be redeveloped for modern housing. Whether these areas

should be retained and protected or promoted for change is an issue that Council must determine with the community.

In applying the NCO, it is also necessary to gain broad support from the community for additional controls. As noted, community values form an important part of the basis for such controls, in terms of their scope and content. Council planners have advised that to date there has been no indication from the community that this level of control is warranted. The exception to this are precincts within Alphington, which will be surveyed as a part of Council's heritage work.

Preparation of Planning Scheme Amendment documentation for NCOs would require a brief additional survey to confirm precinct boundaries and check details in relation to proposed numeric standards that may be included in the overlay schedule, such as building heights and setbacks.

Strategic redevelopment sites

Council requested that the study team investigate five large sites (or groups of sites) that offer potential for redevelopment for higher density residential. An initial site analysis was conducted for each and design parameters have been recommended. These are included as Appendix 9.

While this design guidance will have reference document status, Council may wish to develop more detailed guidance in the future and introduce site specific controls such as a Design and Development Overlay (DDO) or Development Plan Overlay (DPO), should this be required. Both of these controls would have the effect of embedding specific siting and design parameters within the Planning Scheme for a particular site or sites.

6.5   Conclusions: Statutory Implementation

In conclusion, the following steps are recommended to achieve statutory implementation of the Neighbourhood Character Study:

- The MSS should be amended to include the updated Study and brochures as reference documents, and to make clearer reference to the key findings of the Study.

- The Urban Character Policy should be amended to reflect the outcomes of the updated Study and brochures. It is recommended that the Policy include from the brochures the Preferred Character Statement of each precinct. It is also recommended that the design objectives and design responses are included in the Policy. This could be formatted in a number of ways, with the objectives and responses listed for each precinct, grouped for each Character Area Type or for the entire municipality. The best approach to formatting the Policy would become clear upon drafting and following discussion with Council planners and the DSE.

- Changes to the ResCode standards are not recommended as there is currently insufficient evidence to demonstrate that they would be warranted. Council may reconsider this recommendation upon review of the operation of ResCode in tandem with the updated Local Policy.

- Introduction of the Residential 3 Zone is not recommended as there is insufficient grounds to demonstrate that building height over two storeys is a major issue. There is also insufficient grounds that the Residential 3 Zone

should be introduced so that variations to the ResCode schedule could be introduced in specific parts of the municipality.

- Eight areas were identified as having potential neighbourhood character significance due to a particularly consistent or unique character. Some of these areas, and other areas adjoining existing Heritage Overlay areas, were thought to potentially have heritage significance. It is recommended that Council complete the heritage study of the municipality prior to further investigation of additional neighbourhood character controls.

- Council may consider the application of a Design and Development Overlay or Development Plan Overlay for strategic redevelopment sites.

- The recommendations of this Study show no basis for applying any other type of Overlay Control to achieve desired neighbourhood character outcomes.

6.6 Non-Statutory Implementation

Non-statutory tools can provide an important means of implementing Council's neighbourhood character objectives. The public domain, which includes elements such as street trees, roads, footpaths, kerbs and channels, parks and reserves, has a significant impact on the neighbourhood character of an area. It is not only a question of appearance, but also of location, and the desired geometrical arrangement of all the elements, and how they will relate to each other. The Council is often directly or indirectly responsible for the undertaking of these works and management of assets, and therefore is ideally positioned to maximise the achievement of character objectives.

Design Coordination

While this study was not asked to make specific recommendations about the public domain, decisions about changes or strategies will ideally have some reference to the neighbourhood context determined by this study. The key character contributions of the public domain are included in each precinct description. This generally relates to distinctive street planting, such as avenue trees or planter beds, bluestone kerbing or a precinct's location alongside a public reserve.

The best way of coordinating works in the public domain with the design principles established for each precinct by this study is, in the short term, to establish a coordination mechanism.

Council has in place an Urban Design Group that meets to collaboratively make decisions about the design aspects of works within road reserves. The Group is represented by Open Space Planning, Transport Management and Planning, and Capital Works. The Urban Design Group is responsible for implementing Council policies that impact on the design of road reserves:

- Darebin Streetscape Strategy – Green Streets

- Darebin Open Space Strategy

- Going Places – Darebin Integrated Travel Plan

- Darebin Cycling Strategy.

The terms of reference of this group could be expanded to:

- Include all areas of the public domain such as parks, public plazas, creek corridors etc.

- Build up a consistent character across defined local areas (preferably the precincts defined in the Neighbourhood Character Study).

- Establish guidelines for the conduct of public consultation about public domain design, with mechanisms designed to accommodate pressures for divergent treatments in every location within a strategic, consistent approach.

Community Encouragement and Education

Education and encouragement, partly by means of forming partnerships, is an essential aspect of implementation.

The following strategies could be adopted:

- Education of real estate agents, developers and landowners generally.

- Education of design and building professionals.

- Encouragement schemes for 'good character' developments.

The kinds of techniques that could be used to give effect to these strategies could include:

- Information leaflets

- Workshops

- Award schemes

- Displays

- Media articles/events

The partnership aspect of this option could be fostered by bringing stakeholders with differing perspectives (eg residents and developers) together into the same forum. This may be best accomplished independently of a contentious planning application with statutory time limits.

Staff Skilling and Design Advice

It takes time to come to grips with a topic like neighbourhood character. The Council's statutory planners need continued support and skilling to make the best use of this study's recommendations. Correct approaches to site analysis, knowledge about acceptable design solutions, familiarity with architectural styles, and consistency of decisions are all important. Training sessions, workshops and review of current applications by urban design consultants are useful techniques. In addition, training may be required by other parts of the Council organisation where the recommendations impact upon public domain works designed and undertaken by engineering personnel or contractors in accordance with specifications prepared by Council staff.

Resourcing may be an issue in the implementation of the recommendations of this study, as some recommendations such as increasing controls over buildings and vegetation and more detailed assessment of design, may result in increased workloads for planning staff. The Council must be aware of this potential and monitor the effect of introducing new controls to ensure that implementation of the study is effective.

Above all, the Council must determine to 'send out the right message' to the development community through consistent decision making as well as communication techniques discussed earlier. That message must foster an expectation that the best quality design is expected, and that applicants will be subject to delays or refusal if they fail to meet this expectation.

Statutory Support

The main vehicles for statutory support are the Precinct Character Statements and the local policy described above. Planning controls will also provide significant help, as will the community education and encouragement initiatives referred to above. However, there are allied or associated measures that can be taken.

Possibilities include:

- Permit conditions.

- Better enforcement of planning conditions.

- Increased publicity about penalties.

- Active monitoring of works undertaken without permission (eg illegal carports).

- Local Laws.

Appendix 1
Community Bulletins

Community Bulletin No. 1 — *November 2005*

Neighbourhood Character Study

The City of Darebin has commissioned a Neighbourhood Character Study. This will review the original Urban Character Study completed in 1998 and provide up to date recommendations. The Study will include most residential areas in the municipality (refer to map overleaf).

In consultation with the community, the Neighbourhood Character Study aims to identify valued elements of the residential character that should be retained and enhanced.

Guidelines will be developed as a part of the Study to ensure that future developments respect the valued character.

Melbourne 2030 Housing Distribution Framework

Melbourne 2030 – the State government's planning framework for Melbourne – requires Darebin to accommodate an additional 8000 houses over the next 25 years. Darebin Council has undertaken work over the last few years to determine the most appropriate locations for these houses which will mainly be close to shopping centres and along public transport routes. Come along to the workshops and find out what we are considering.

Be involved!

The Neighbourhood Character Study will commence with three Community Workshops to be held in November. Council invites anyone with an interest in the character of their neighbourhood to attend the workshop in their area. Design professionals or developers working in each area are also encouraged to attend.

There will be many opportunities to voice your opinions and have input throughout the preparation of the Neighbourhood Character Study, and the Community Workshops are the starting point.

Community Working Group

A Community Working Group will be established to provide focused input to the Neighbourhood Character Study. The Working Group will comprise around 12 members with a range of interests and experience, who live or work in different parts of the municipality. The Working Group will meet at the end of each stage of the Study to provide feedback to the Study team, offer suggestions and assist in meeting the aims and objectives of the project.

If you are interested in nominating for a place on the Community Working Group, please register your interest by contacting Alice on 8470 8465.

Community Workshops

The workshops have been planned to look at neighbourhood character issues in the municipality in three different sections: the Preston and Thornbury area; the Reservoir, Kingsbury and Bundoora area and the Northcote, Fairfield and Alphington area. The residential areas within the Northcote and Preston Central Structure Plans and the proposed Reservoir Structure Plan are not included as they are part of separate studies (please refer to the map on the other side of this leaflet).

Preston & Thornbury
Monday 21st November, 6.30-8pm
Preston Shire Hall, 286 Gower Street

Reservoir, Kingsbury & Bundoora
Wed 23rd November, 6.30-8pm
Reservoir Civic Centre, 23 Edwardes Street

Northcote, Fairfield & Alphington
Wednesday 30th, 6.30-8pm
Northcote Uniting Church Hall, 251 High Street

RSVP & Questions

To RSVP (for catering purposes) or for any enquiries, please contact Council's Strategic Planning Department:

email*: planning@darebin.vic.gov.au*

phone: City of Darebin 8470 8465

Council's website www.darebin.vic.gov.au has information and regular updates on the Study.

Join the mailing list for updates

If you can't attend the workshops but are interested in being kept up to date on the progress of the Study, then please contact Council and have your details added to the mailing list.

Darebin Neighbourhood Character Study

Reservoir

RESERVOIR

Reservoir

Reservoir

Bundoora

Preston

PRESTON

Preston

Thornbury

HIGH
STREET

NORTHCOTE

Northcote

Fairfield

Westgarth

Alphington

Reservoir / Bundoora
workshop:
23 November

Preston / Thornbury
workshop:
21 November

Northcote / Fairfield
Alphington / Westgarth
workshop:
30 November

Included in study area:

Residential Zones

Excluded from study area:

Structure plan areas

Proposed Structure plan areas

High Street Urban Design Framework study area

Heritage Overlay areas

Non Residential Zones

North   Metres   200   400   600   800   1000

Community Bulletin No. 2 *February 2006*

Neighbourhood Character Study *Progress Update*

This Community Bulletin provides an update on the progress of the Neighbourhood Character Study, which was commenced in November last year.

The aim of the Study is to review the original Urban Character Study completed in 1998 and provide up to date recommendations. The Study includes most residential areas in the municipality.

The Neighbourhood Character Study is being undertaken in three stages:

Stage 1: Background information gathering, including initial community consultation.
Stage 2: Street-by-street survey of all residential areas and identification of neighbourhood character precincts.
Stage 3: Recommendations and guidelines for each precinct.

Stages 1 and 2 of the Study have now been completed and we are moving into Stage 3. Two Community Workshops have been held, a Community Working Group has been formed and the Study team has conducted detailed surveys of all residential areas in the municipality. At the end of Stage 3 we will be seeking detailed input from the community on the Study's recommendations and guidelines for each precinct.

Community Workshops

Three Community Workshops were held in November and December last year. They were planned to look at neighbourhood character issues in the municipality in three different sections: the Preston and Thornbury area; the Reservoir, Kingsbury and Bundoora area and the Northcote, Fairfield and Alphington area.

They were well attended with around 60 people coming along to talk about what they value about their neighbourhood. Attendees included local residents and design professionals who live or work in Darebin, representing a range of viewpoints.

The workshops provided essential background to the Study. In-depth group discussion provided invaluable insights into what people like and dislike about their neighbourhoods, and how they would like to see their neighbourhoods improved in the future.

Photographic Exercise

At the workshops disposable cameras were handed out to volunteers who were asked to take photographs of aspects of their neighbourhood that they particularly like or dislike. The results of this photographic exercise were displayed at the first Community Working Group meeting. The photographs proved to be an excellent way for people to communicate what they value about their particular neighbourhood, the type of development they think should be avoided, and their aspirations of how they would like their neighbourhood to be like in the future.

Community Working Group

A Community Working Group has been established to provide focused input to the Neighbourhood Character Study. The Working Group comprises 12 members with a range of interests and experience, who live or work in different parts of the municipality. The Working Group meets at the end of each stage of the Study to provide feedback to the Study team, offer suggestions and assist in meeting the aims and objectives of the project.

Detailed Survey

Following the workshops, the Study team conducted a detailed survey of all residential areas in Darebin. Every residential street was surveyed and the key features of every neighbourhood recorded. From this detailed survey, Issues Papers have been prepared for each precinct, with the assistance of the Community Working Group.

Questions and Comments

For any questions about the Study, comments you would like to make or to join the mailing list for regular updates, please contact Council's Strategic Planning Department:
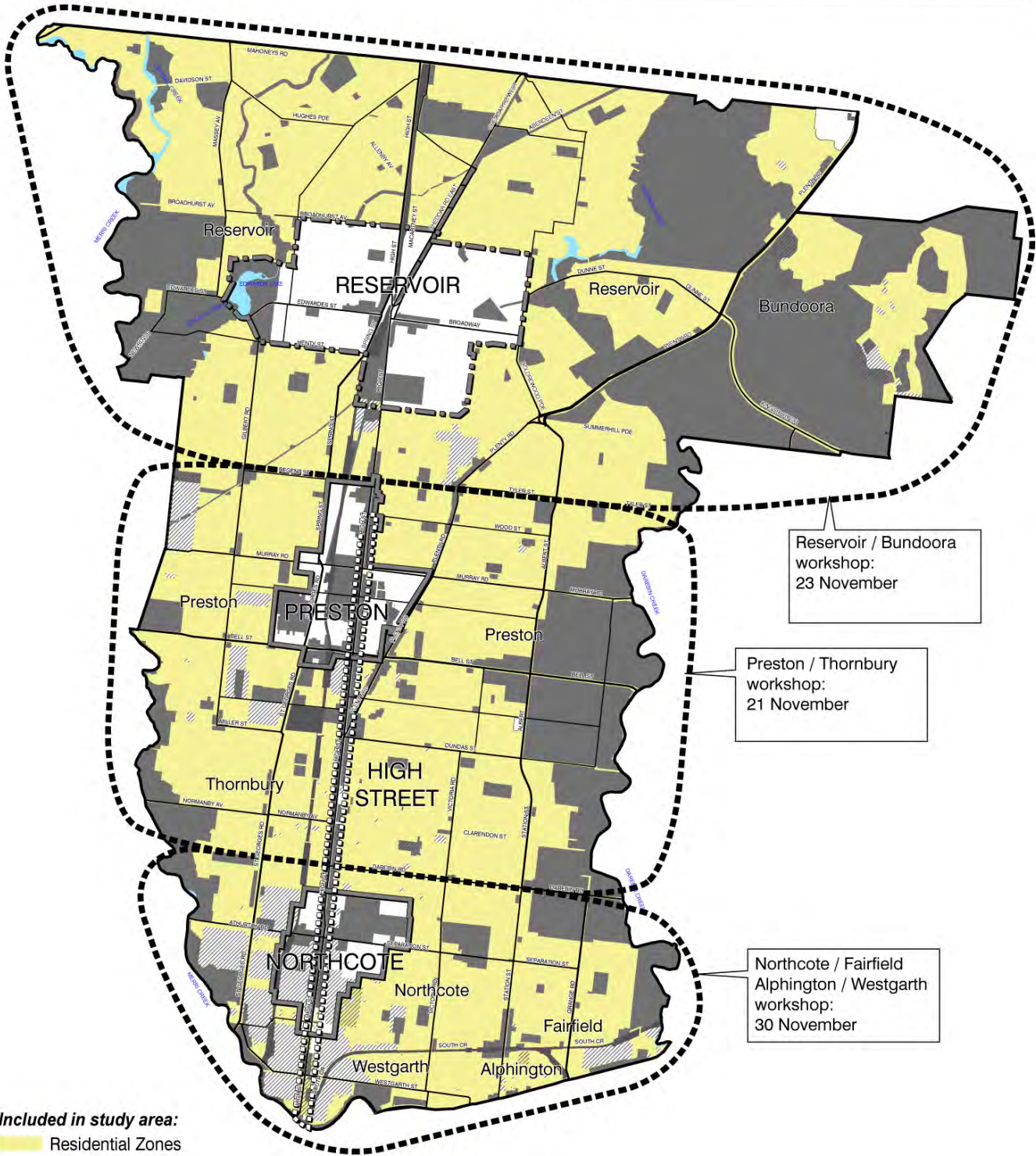
> **email***: planning@darebin.vic.gov.au*

> **phone:** City of Darebin 8470 8465

Council's website www.darebin.vic.gov.au also has information and regular updates on the Study.

Appendix 2
Community Workshop Summary

Community Workshops : summary of responses

Community Workshop 1: Preston & Thornbury

21st November, Preston Shire Hall

A total of 10 people attended the workshop, 4 from the Thornbury area, 5 from the Preston area, and one from Northcote (bordering Thornbury). One participant from Preston left in the early stages of the workshop. These comments also include a summary of the written submission received from one Preston resident who attended the Northcote meeting.

Thornbury

Most of the comments made were in relation to East Thornbury, where the participants lived.

What do you like about the character of your neighbourhood?
− Quietness
− Eucalypt trees – haven for native birds (near Thornbury High School)
− Estension of Darebin Creek area
− Wide roads, vegetation at intersections (roundabouts)
− Bike paths
− Heritage of the area
− Predominant character of houses – Victorian, Edwardian – free standing timber or concrete homes
− Parks
− Unique spaciousness of blocks
− Unique character of Thornbury Village that allows for off-street parking
− Attachment to the home – your castle, home sweet home
− Good school facilities – primary, secondary
− Laneways – that are maintained

What do you dislike about the character of your neighbourhood?
− Characterless shops, grills at front
− Ugly Station Street Shopping Centre at Rossmoyne Street – Rossmoyne Village
− Subdivision of blocks
− Graffiti
− New houses out of character, ugly
− Double storey buildings out of character with the street
− Tennis court development of St Mary's Church – inappropriate (7 units) – "bat wings"
− Road surface covered with hoon skids
− Flinders St/Harry St, near Hayes Park division of control – ugly, unmade road on one side
− Buildings that are eyesores
− Overlooking
− Lack of maintenance of large block nature strips, and of unique laneways
− Inability of Council to address rampant dumping of rubbish, e.g. Salvation Army, High Street

How would you like to see your neighbourhood improved?
− Better landscaping (e.g. Bastings St)
− Maintenance of Council trees (after storms)
− Dept of Human Services – improve appearance of State Housing
− As much Council money as is spent in Fairfield and Northcote put into Thornbury, e.g. beautify shopping centre, some artwork – "The poor also need beauty"
− Post audit study – control of trees being chopped down

- Appropriate pruning of street trees
- Traffic control near Thornbury High School
- Policing parking restrictions
- Establish a "heart" at Rossmoyne Village
- CERES type development at Brunswick
- Street cleaning e.g. use of water cannons (like were used 40 years ago)
- Preservation of streetscape
- Roundabouts with flowers
- Improved nature strips – "natural light"
- Footpaths (remove pot holes)
- Copy of Viewbank (differing views on this)

Preston

What do you like about the character of your neighbourhood?
- Proximity to transport – tram, bus, train, interchange
- Shopping
- Street appearance – wider ones, nature strips, trees
- Footpaths
- Housing – OK appearance – heritage, Californian bungalows OK
- Gardens and open space
- Open vista and existing privacy – due to low scale development
- Homes with back and front yards which attract families
- Family oriented
- Privacy and peacefulness
- 'Old world charm' homes – e.g. Edwardian, Cal. Bungalows
- Parkland, trees and flora
- Front gardens
- Our diversity

What do you dislike about the character of your neighbourhood?
- Slow development (when permits are issued but the development doesn't take place)
- Streets – care and maintenance, overhanging branches, cleaning of lanes, dog droppings, need more drought resistent planning
- Housing – height limit should be 6 storeys
- Small, denser development, small blocks cut up with little garden
- Prefer open space
- Development of ex railway land
- Old ex Housing Commission homes – not maintained
- Multi storey units/apartments replacing lower scale properties/homes: erodes family neighbourhood character; loss of privacy; creates "boxed" feel; loss of open sky vista: results in more people at close quarters.
- Block dwellings and flat line roofs
- Increasing number of poles and signs in our streets

How would you like to see your neighbourhood improved?
- Concerns about transport – encourage increased usage and security
- Improve frequency of maintenance of streets (see dislikes)
- Graffiti removal
- More neat and regular cleaning
- Footpaths – repairs and maintenance
- Bike lanes - more
- More off street car parking (no carparks is a nice but ineffective policy)
- Darebin should continue to attract families into the area, this should be its number one focus
- With Melbourne 2030, multistorey dwellings will be more than accommodated on the main arterial roads, but keep them out of the inner residential zones.

Community Workshop 2: Reservoir & Bundoora

23rd November, Reservoir Civic Centre

Ten people attended this workshop. This included residents from Reservoir, Bundoora and Kingsbury as well as a number of design/development professionals living and working in the area.

Reservoir

What do you like about the character of your neighbourhood?
−   It's a residential area, family area
−   New development is improving the quality of housing in the area
−   Renovated housing shows people taking pride in their area
−   Greenery - street vegetation and landscaping areas
−   Large lots and gardens
−   Proximity of shops and schools
−   Medium density housing developments improve streets as they replace run down buildings
−   Family homes on large sites
−   Friendly neighbours, sense of community
−   Good to see people opting for sustainable development e.g. solar panels

What do you dislike about the character of your neighbourhood?
−   Prevalence of multi-dwelling developments – turning the area into slum
−   Large family home lots are being sold for land to developers
−   Losing room for families
−   Losing trees and increasing concrete
−   Crowding of housing and people
−   Quiet neighbourhood has become very busy
−   More cars and traffic and parking problems
−   Double storey development in single storey street – out of character and overlooks private garden
−   People living in multi-dwellings are transient in nature and invite more litter and graffiti
−   Two dwellings on a large lot are a fact of life but five dwellings (which is often seen) is too many
−   Many of the mulit-dwelling developments are ugly
−   Developments often don't meet requirement of 40m2 private open space
−   Not enough private open space for larger units – doesn't take into consideration the number of bedrooms
−   Poor quality renovations e.g. those with brick cladding and aluminium window frames

How would you like to see your neighbourhood improved?
−   Need more dog walking space

Bundoora (including Kingsbury and Mt Cooper estate)

What do you like about the character of your neighbourhood?
−   Bundoora Square in close proximity
−   Sugar gum trees in street
−   Value sense of neighborhood and community
−   Kingsbury Primary School has a strong community tradition. People use the oval on the weekends and it is a valuable community resource.

What do you dislike about the character of your neighbourhood?
−   The streetscapes are bare – there is a lack of trees and shrubs in people's gardens (not the right soil for growing trees)
−   Multi dwelling development will see more traffic flow in narrow streets

– Multi dwellings mean less families and fewer children enrolled in the Primary School – school community may disappear

How would you like to see your neighbourhood improved?
– Street trees need maintenance
– Landmark entry point to estate (Mt Cooper housing estate)
– Kingsbury Primary School oval could be improved by Council as it is used by the community on the week-ends

General comments

These comments were contributed by design/development professionals and relate to the wider Darebin municipality.

Concerns about new development:
– Pressure for redevelopment across the City
– Loss of vegetation or new development that is provided with inadequate vegetation

Supporting new development:
– Increased density will see increased public transport service and usage
– More new housing will replace run-down housing
– More people moving into the area will create a sense of community and liveliness

Other comments:
– Higher density is OK as long as buildings are well designed – the most important thing to consider is 'beauty'
– Covenants are important in retaining character – they should be upheld
– Make the planning and building permit approvals process more streamlined – it's too complex
– VCAT shows increasingly less discrimination in determining planning appeals
– VCAT are more concerned about density rather than good design
– VCAT frequently over-ride local concerns and approve development that is not in keeping with the area
– Rescode demands quality of development and so does Council

Community Workshop 3: Northcote, Fairfield, Alphington

30th November, Northcote Uniting Church

Around 25 people attended this workshop. This included residents from Northcote, Fairfield and Alphington as well as a number of design/development professionals.

Northcote

What do you like about the character of your neighbourhood?
– Period homes (Californian bungalows, edwardian, workers cottages, federation styles)
– Family homes
– Single-levelled homes, freestanding homes
– Good services
– Gardens/vegetation
– Renovating period homes
– Privacy and peace
– Parks, open spaces and bushland – 3 rivers/creeks
– Footpaths
– Community gardens
– Shools – primary/sec
– Entertainment/pubs
– Gallery

- German cemetary
- History (diversity) and culture
- Artistic culture
- Views – Ruckers Hill
- Mixed housing style in places
- Pedestrian and cycle paths and lanes
- Access to public transport – buses, trams, trains
- 1 and 2 storey with 2 storey to the rear
- Setback of houses
- Rejuvenation of commercial areas

What do you dislike about the character of your neighbourhood?
- Diversity of new style buildings
- Block apartments/subdivision
- Impinging on privacy
- Inappropriate design
- Lack of parking and manipulation of parking standards
- Back laneways cleaned
- Speed limit on High St
- Developers cutting down trees
- High density developments!!!
- Greedy developers
- Overdevelopment: No more than 2 storey in residential streets, 3 storey in commercial areas
- Traffic management e.g. through road clearways
- Car parking
- Non period housing, especially in area with period housing
- Alteration of a setback
- Inappropriate commercial uses in residential areas

How would you like to see your neighbourhood improved?
- Plant more flora – trees
- Better mix of business
- Choice of rubbish bin sizes
- Train hooters silenced
- Streetscape e.g. footpath improvements
- Maintain roundabouts
- Infrastructure – sewer, health, transport (overcrowded peak hour service)
- Parking facilities for residents
- Bike facilities for lock up
- Restricted parking around transport areas
- Parking inspectors enforcing rules

Fairfield

What do you like about the character of your neighbourhood?
- Space – backyard/front yard, detached housing
- Period character – Victorian, Edwardian, Californian Bungalow
- Neighbourhood feel
- Low density – landscaped gardens
- Shopping centre – variety, parking
- Parks – number, amenity, landscape
- Tree scaped streets
- Amenity – in the streetscape as well as each home holds a unique amenity
- Access to public transport

What do you dislike about the character of your neighbourhood?
- Medium and high density development

- Contemporary development
- Too much traffic
- Lack of parking – infrastructure around Station St, Station
- Dislike Melbourne 2030
- Thuggish developers
- Overdevelopment in certain areas
- Disregard for value of property – period (single dwelling)
- Unfinished work or bombsites
- Loss of original character to the area
- Flood zone exaggerated by new and innapropriate development
- Loss of original housing stock

How would you like to see your neighbourhood improved?
- Ensure quality developments
- Heritage Overlay – to improve controls over development
- Appropriate Council development e.g. library/childcare, street furniture
- Reduce traffic
- Improve parking – railway station, Station St, rest of Fairfield
- Restrict development to low density/low height
- Fairfield = #5 most liveable suburbs in Melbourne
- Prevent flooding
- Radical approach to re-sale – by discouraging real estate agents promoting potential
- Prevent waiving car parks
- Maintain and enahnce parkland

Alphington

What do you like about the character of your neighbourhood?
- Single houses surrounded by gardens and trees (one house – one block)
- Heritage homes – Victorian, Edwardian, Cal. Bungalows
- Single storey homes (in general – most homes single storey)
- Owner occupied homes (family homes)
- Large family homes
- Seeing the dky between homes
- Good community spirit
- Small neighbourhood shops
- Having space for gardens
- Low density
- Parklands close by (Darebin – Joha, Yarra River)
- Abundant birdlife – wildlife corridors
- Quiet and safe area
- Little through traffic
- Lots of open space and off street parking
- Very green with leafy streets
- Ideal for bringing up children
- Being able to park in front of your home
- Wide footpaths and nature strips

What do you dislike about the character of your neighbourhood?
- Units and developments comin into the area
- Buildings that take up the whole block
- Buildings that have "too much" "built form" on the block.
- Two storey "bulky" buildings
- Units/developments bringing more cars/traffic and people into the area
- More cars competing for parking spaces
- Medium/high density development.

How would you like to see your neighbourhood improved?

- It's already a great neighbourhood, BUT it needs protection (HO - Heritage Overlay?) from medium density of unit development or inappropriate developments (i.e. bulky, high)
- Any new dwelling must have significant landscaping/trees around dwelling
- Have a maximum height limit of two storeys (7.5 metres) for any new dwelling
- Must have adequate off street parking
- No medium density development in Alphington (retain low-density character)
- More trees and garden character
- Retain large blocks for relaxation
- Hooters from trains (make them quieter)

Appendix 3

Community Committee Summary

Darebin Neighbourhood Character Study

Community Committee meeting notes

Community Committee 1 : 13th December 2005

Function Room, Darebin Council Offices

Agenda

The agenda for this meeting included:

- Introduction to the Neighbourhood Character Study
  – Brief
  – Method and timing
  – Terms of Reference for Community Committee

- Community Workshop Outcomes
  – Attendance
  – Summary of responses (notes attached)

- Community Photographic Exercise Outcomes
  – Presentation of photo boards
  – Discussion

- Next Steps

Group discussion

Key issues raised by the Committee during discussion on the photo boards:

- Setbacks, gardens and private open space - in what instances these are particularly important and how the planning scheme can assure they are adequately provided.

- Maintaining parks and garden space for children.

- Finding the right balance between consistency and variety in a streetscape. Buildings shouldn't look the same but should also fit in with their context.

- Avoiding 'boxy' buildings. In most cases people dislike them, however sometimes a box-like design can be well accomplished and acceptable in the right location.

- Concerns about double storey development that is out of scale with the streetscape. Planning controls are not able to prevent double storey buildings, however, they can require design techniques to be employed that minimise the visual impact of double storey buildings .

- The pros and cons of new buildings that are designed to look like heritage buildings:
  – some people consider them to fit in better with the streetscape than contemporary buildings
  – others see them as a mis-representation of historic architectural styles and that they are not allowing the 'heritage of the future' to be created.

- Concerns about contemporary architectural styles in streets with more traditional styles. How can new buildings be designed to respect existing streetscape character?

- The importance of well chosen colours and materials and the quality of finish in a building's appearance.

- Parking on street – often tandem spaces in multi-unit developments are not used and people park on the street.

- Concerns about high brick walls that are unsightly in the streetscape.

- The importance of a welcoming front entrance, in terms of door, window and fence design. Lack of clear front entrances to new dwellings creates a sense of hostility.

- Appropriate locations for second storey additions – should they be toward the front of a building, which may have a greater impact on the streetscape, or should they be towards the back of a building, which may have greater impact on neighbours' amenity?

- What are the planning controls available to realise preferred neighbourhood character? Options include:
  – Neighbourhood Character Study included as a Local Policy in the Planning Scheme. Applications requiring a permit will be assessed against the Study. This includes dwellings on lots less than $300m^2$ or $500m^2$ and more than one dwelling on a lot.
  – The Residential 3 Zone, which limits the height of buildings to 9m, could be applied to parts of the municipality where single storey development predominates. This would only apply to areas without buildings of 9m, or where it is unlikely that people would want to construct buildings over 9m.
  – In areas of particularly consistent or unique character, a Neighbourhood Character Overlay could be applied. A permit would be required for most development, including single dwellings.
  – In areas of demonstrated heritage significance a Heritage Overlay could be applied.

Community Committee 2 : 2nd February 2006

Preston Shire Hall

Agenda

The agenda for this meeting included:

- Detailed survey
  – Description of the survey brief and method

- Character Area Types
  – Explanation of character area types with photo boards

- Precinct Issues Papers
  – Structure and content of Precinct Issues Papers
  – Sample of Precinct Issues Papers
  – Discussion

- Housing Distribution Strategy and Structure Plan areas

- How housing strategy will feed into NCS with the identification of areas for minimal change or incremental change, which are mostly around structure plan areas.
- Structure planning will be done for the incremental change areas to address residential design issues.
- Importance of providing a diversity of housing.

- Discussion
- Next Steps

Group discussion

Key issues raised by the Committee:

- Some Committee members spoke about the importance of having a diversity of building styles to make streetscapes more interesting.

- Committee members spoke variously about providing a range of housing types for different family types. Discussion included the importance of maintaining single family homes and retaining a 'family friendly' environment. Others spoke about the concept of family in a broader sense and providing for all family types in the community which includes singles, couples without children, the elderly etc. as well as traditional nuclear families.

- How can architecture in the suburbs support people interacting? Design techniques that could help include:
  - avoiding blank walls
  - providing a front garden – opportunity to interact with neighbours.

Community Committee 3 : 30th March 2006

Function Room, Darebin Council Offices

Agenda

The agenda for this meeting included:

- Consultation feedback on PIPs
  - From Community Committee and Darebin Festival
  - Summary of feedback on PIPs and changes that will be included in guidelines is attached.

- Brochures
  - A3 colour example of final brochure production
  - Examples of other guidelines

- Next steps
  - Community Committee responses to brochure and guidelines by mid April.
  - Brochures produced for each area.
  - Updated map produced.
  - Report prepared, which will include guidelines for the public realm and key development sites, and detailed implementation recommendations.
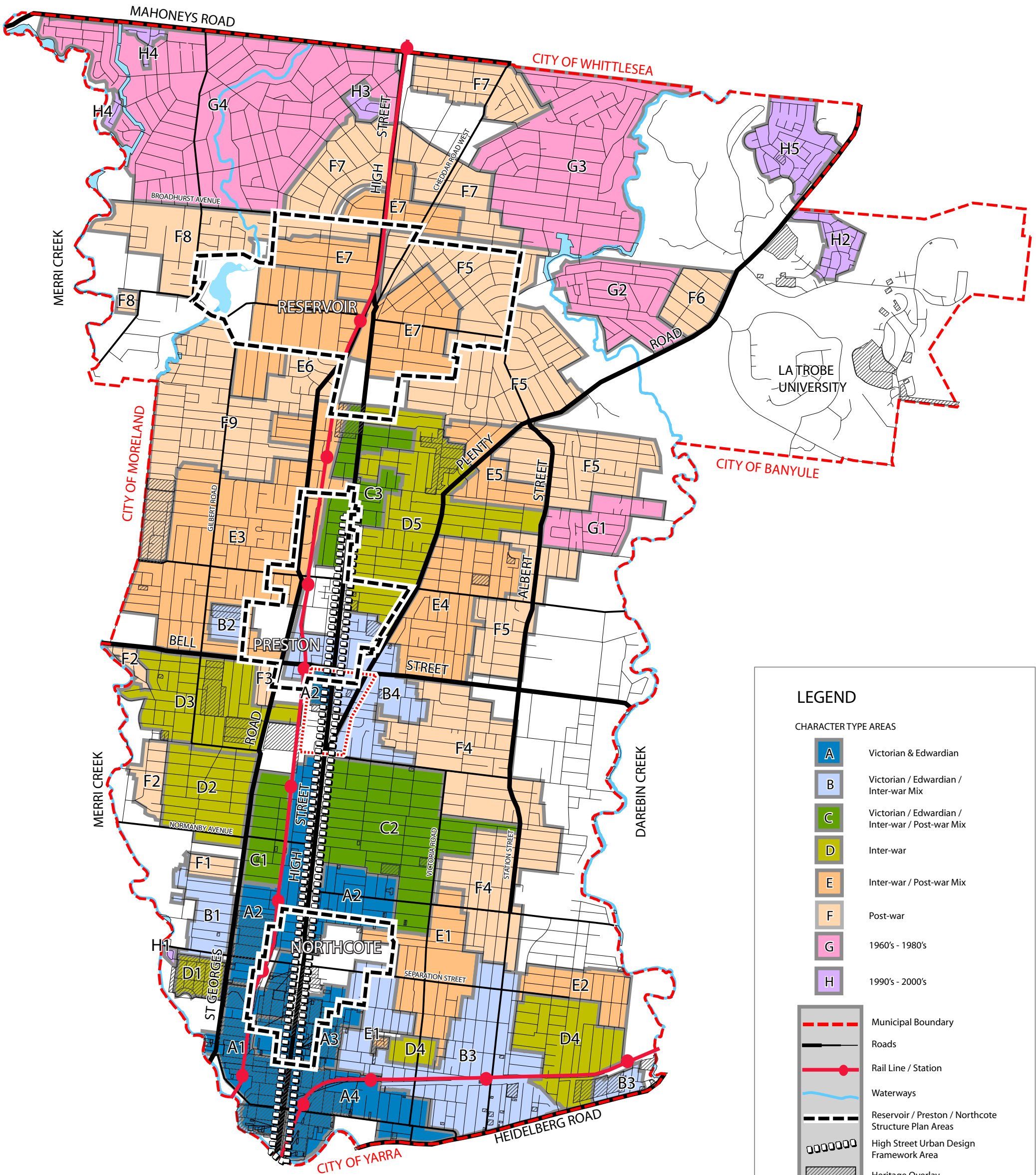
Group discussion

Key issues raised by the Committee:

- How to implement the guidelines so that the objectives and design responses can be achieved and enforced.

- Demolition of period dwellings. We are unable to stop demolition unless there is a Heritage Overlay. To apply this control a rigorous heritage assessment is required and the heritage significance of the place must be demonstrated – it cannot be used as an anti-demolition tool.

- Concern about the use of the word 'encourage' in the guidelines, in relation to 'encourage retention of period buildings' – what does this mean? Only a few areas of the municipality will have planning controls that can apply to demolition and construction/alteration of single dwellings. Mostly these are included in the Heritage Overlay. Outside of these areas encouragement is an important means of achieving the objectives of the NCS. This can include:
  - Workshops with developers, designers and home owners about restoration/retention of buildings.
  - Raising awareness amongst the development industry that retaining period buildings can add value to a development.
  - Discussing the importance of achieving the objectives of the NCS with developers/designers/home owners in the pre-application stage can have a positive effect upon the outcome of a development.
  - Investigating 'trade-offs' that can be made with developers if original buildings are retained.

- Clarity of guideline images and presentation of brochure. Images will be amended or captioned to ensure clarity.

- Amendment of precinct boundaries (specifically, request for Storey Rd Reservoir to be included as an E precinct, not an F). This will be investigated.

Appendix 4
Precinct Map

MAHONEYS ROAD

CITY OF WHITTLESEA

H4
H4
G4
H3
H5
F7
F7
F7
H2
BROADHURST AVENUE
F8
E7
G3
F7
F8
E7
F5
G2
F6
RESERVOIR
E7
ROAD
MERRI CREEK
E6
F5
LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY
E7
F9
CITY OF BANYULE
PLENTY
E5
C3
F5
CITY OF MORELAND
D5
STREET
E3
ALBERT
F5
G1
B2
E4
BELL
PRESTON
F5
F2
F3
A2
B4
STREET
D3
F4
ROAD
MERRI CREEK
F2
D2
F4
C2
NORMANBY AVENUE
VICTORIA ROAD
DAREBIN CREEK
F1
C1
STATION STREET
HIGH
B1
A2
A2
F4
STREET
H1
E1
D1
NORTHCOTE
ST GEORGES
SEPARATION STREET
E2
A1
A3
E1
D4
B3
D4
A4
B3
CITY OF YARRA
HEIDELBERG ROAD

LEGEND

CHARACTER TYPE AREAS

A Victorian & Edwardian

B Victorian / Edwardian / Inter-war Mix

C Victorian / Edwardian / Inter-war / Post-war Mix

D Inter-war

E Inter-war / Post-war Mix

F Post-war

G 1960's - 1980's

H 1990's - 2000's

---- Municipal Boundary

—— Roads

—— Rail Line / Station

—— Waterways

- - - Reservoir / Preston / Northcote Structure Plan Areas

High Street Urban Design Framework Area

Heritage Overlay

······ Darebin Junction

0   .5   1
Kilometres

CITY OF DAREBIN
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER STUDY

CHARACTER AREAS AND PRECINCTS - Draft February 2006

Appendix 5

Precinct Issues Papers

Precinct Issues Papers : Consultation Summary

Summary of responses to Precinct Issues Papers received from the Community Committee (and others): February - April 2006

Precinct	Issues	Responses
B3	**Precinct Description** should include:	Add recommended characteristics to Precinct Description.
	• B3 is generally a mix of Vic/Edwardian housing with later mix of interwar housing.	
	• Due to bad soil in the area, original houses were nearly exclusively weatherboard.	
	• Materials – mixed building materials including w/board, brick & render.	
	• Precinct very flat.	
	• Free-standing dwellings with private backyards.	
	• Some streets are intact with no driveways down one side of the street, with onstreet parking at the front & offstreet parking from back entrance.	
	• Front boundary – gardens are usually small & appropriate to building style.	
	• Landmarks should include schools, churches, FIDO (dog statue), Station St Village Shopping Centre and transport hub/railway station, Community Centre.	
B3	**Issues / Threats** should include:	Add to Issues / Threats.
	• Buildings being constructed with cheap, poor materials.	
	• High front fences.	
	• Overdevelopment of sites causing overshadowing.	
	• Building footprints becoming to large.	

Precinct	Issues	Responses
	• Increased traffic congestion.	
	• Old houses on big blocks being pulled down and dual occupancies replacing them.	
	• Driveways in places where there are no driveways in an intact street.	
	• Development in backyards.	
B3	**Community Values** should include:	Add to Community Values.
	• Building styles reflect a human scale and the openness of the sky & natural environment.	
	• Overall amenity of area, respect for existing variety of uses as a place to live, work, socialise.	
	• A place to live where families can know their neighbours. A place to live where you won't end up being surrounded by dual occ's.	
B3	Amend **Policy Context**: MSS should reflect individualism of precincts as opposed to homogeneity.	MSS or Local Policy can be amended as a part of the implementation of the Study to include specific comments about each precinct.
B3	**Preferred Character Statement** too general. Needs to be more specific.	The Preferred Character Statement is a general description of what the precinct could be like in the future. It is designed to bring out the key characteristics of the precinct and explain how they fit together. The design guidelines provide the detail of how this will be achieved.
	Amend **Preferred Character Statement**:	
B3	Add to last sentence: fences and front setbacks … need to be controlled to reflect the heritage of the overall streetscape and the building style of the property.	Add sentence to Preferred Character Statement re: fences and front setbacks as recommended. Include more detailed reference to heights and styles of fencing in guidelines.
B3	Two storey dwellings and dual occupancies will destroy the character of streetscapes and living amenity. Intact streetscapes should remain intact with no dual occupancies or 2 storeys being	Planning controls are not able to prohibit double storey buildings or dual occupancies. However, when a planning permit is required, planning policy and controls can manage how these

Precinct	Issues	Responses
	allowed where 1 storey predominates. Do not want houses pulled down to be replaced by units.	buildings are designed so that there is minimal impact in terms of amenity or appearance in the streetscape. The Neighbourhood Character Study is a means by which such controls can be introduced.
B3	Streets with no driveways should remain.	Design guidelines can stipulate that new crossovers /driveways are avoided in streets where this is the existing pattern.
B3	Need 6m height limits for buildings, development consistent with surrounding streets as well.	Res 3 Zone could be applied to precincts (but not individual streets) where there is predominantly single storey buildings, introducing a mandatory 9m height limit. To be investigated for the Study recommendations.
B3	Encourage dwellings to be sympathetic to existing streetscape, with provision for veg as screening to soften impact. Preferred Character Statement (as written) could allow for any kind of building as long as they use screening, which will not reduce the impact of a building that is 8m tall, 6m wide.	Vegetation and the landscape quality of the area is an important neighbourhood character attribute in its own right. It is also important as a screening device to reduce the appearance of building form in a streetscape. Using vegetation as a screen does not imply that a lesser standard of building design is acceptable.
B3	Indigenous gardens should be encouraged.	Included in guidelines. Reference to the Council publication about indigenous plants and sustainable gardening in Darebin.
B3	**Precinct boundary** comments: B4 should be part of A4 or A5	To be investigated.
	Other comments:	
	Heritage Overlay is not necessarily the best method of preservation. Need a policy restricting overdevelopment that limits infill development and subdivision.	Heritage Overlay (as noted above) is a planning tool to be used to specifically protect places of identified heritage significance, not to prevent or manage development in general. Council's housing distribution strategy is currently investigating potential locations for increased housing provision, which will thereby justify a 'minimal change' policy in all other residential areas.
	Some advice on traffic calming & parking is essential.	The scope of the Neighbourhood Character Study does not include these issues, however, comments from the community will

Precinct	Issues	Responses
		be passed on to the relevant sections of Council.
	Building setback needs to allow for adequate garden space in proportion to the building footprint & level.	The guidelines stress the need for maintaining adequate garden space around each dwelling, where this is the established character or preferred future character of an area.
	Maintain the local village atmosphere & encourage pedestrianisation while respecting the need for varied housing stock & personal privacy. Current & future planning needs to balance the existing streetscape & residential amenity of the area…. whilst respecting its diverse and often conflicting uses for land and buildings.	The Study aims to provide for a greater variety of housing, that fits in with the existing neighbourhood character. The other issues are outside the scope of the Study, although they have a clear link to neighbourhood character, and would be considered in other strategic planning projects undertaken by Council.
	New development may be consistent with what is in the same street due to over-development in that street but may not be consistent to adjoining and surrounding streets to which new development will have a huge impact. Respecting neighbourhood character means not building dwellings that are detrimental to existing dwellings.	The Preferred Character Statement describes the future vision for each precinct. New development, where a permit is required, must be consistent with this, rather than using poor quality development as a precedent.
B1 & E6	In Precinct B1 it is suggested that new development should not intrude excessively into the streetscape (Issues/Threats) & in E6 it is suggested that new development should 'respect existing in terms of form' (Preferred Character Statement). What do these mean? Need to quantify or qualify in some way. General use of terminology needs to be explained – ie. What it means to be 'consistent with' or 'with respect' to neighbourhood character. What does 'out of character' mean? Consider changing terminology to be consistent and clearer. Give specific examples of good and bad.	The guidelines provide more specific detail on how to achieve the Preferred Character Statement and avoid the Issues/Threats. The guidelines will include a general note to explain how they are to be used and the meaning of common terms used. Contents of the guidelines will be revised to check terminology is clear. Often, the broader level objectives will use words such as 'out of character', 'consistent with' or 'respect' as a means of describing a general intent. The guidelines will then explain what this means in terms of detail design. In many cases, for example, these terms will mean adopting a similar roof form or setback to existing buildings in the street. While design innovation may be encouraged in other ways, in most precincts these two design elements are the fundamental requirements of ensuring that a new development is a sensitive and positive addition to a streetscape.

Precinct	Issues	Responses
		In some instances an extremely accomplished design may deviate from the design response of the guidelines, while still achieving the Preferred Character Statement and design objectives.
		The guidelines are illustrated to show graphically how different design responses can be achieved.
B1 & E6	There is an excessive emphasis on landscape in Preferred Character, which may be at odds with the geology of the area. Often large canopy trees are not appropriate in the clay soils of Darebin. They can cause excessive movement & structural damage.	Council landscape architects may be able to provide information about appropriate vegetation species suited to clay soils – to be investigated.
C2	In Preferred Character Statement add 'predominant styles of Victorian and Edwardian' to the mix of building styles in the precinct.	Amended as recommended.
F5	Amend precinct boundary to include Storey Road as an E character type, as it includes a number of Interwar dwellings.	To be investigated.
F5	Residents value • private open space that allows room for children to play, biodiversity. • single storey development that allows for dominance of trees and sunlight penetration. • family sized dwellings.	These values have been noted in the brochure. The notion of a 'family' includes many different household types, such as couples with no children, extended families, single people living together, elderly empty nesters etc. in addition to the traditional nuclear family. This diversity of households requires a range of housing types, small and large, to be provided in the community.
F5	**Design considerations.** Reduce the amenity and visual impact of double storey buildings. Require setbacks for upper levels, attic styles or limit double storey at the rear of the site. Multi-storey unit developments should be banned or limited to activity centres. Limit dual crossovers.	Design response states 'box like' buildings to be avoided by way of upper level setbacks or detailed design treatments. Activity centres will be the focus for higher density housing. It is not possible to prohibit double storey development, however, the guidelines can require detailed consideration of visual and amenity impacts. Guidelines limit dual crossovers, unless adequate on street

Precinct	Issues	Responses
	Set higher minimum private open space areas and allow an average across the block for different size units. Require a greater provision of pos for larger blocks in areas with established pos.	parking and frontage landscaping provided.
		Minimum private open space area set by ResCode is 40m^2 per dwelling, however this can be increased. To be investigated.
	Locate garages behind dwellings.	Guidelines stipulate garages should be behind dwellings and not dominate the appearance of the building.
	Retention of canopy trees.	Guidelines stipulate canopy trees should be kept where possible, or landscape plans for new development must provide for planting of new canopy trees.
	Interface with public parks – restrict buildings to single storey so they don't dominate the park.	
	Side and rear setbacks should be large enough to protect private open space and solar access.	New development on sites adjoining parks should provide an appropriate interface. This would include ensuring a suitable landscape treatment on the adjoining property boundary or setting upper levels back. Guidelines will be amended to reflect this.
	Greater control over construction of two storey outbuildings required.	ResCode standards are designed to protect amenity. Howevver, side and rear setback standards may be altered in ResCode – to be investigated.
	Solar access – standard should apply from 8am.	
		Solar access standard – to be investigated.
F5	**Traffic issues.** Suggested increased standards for on and off site parking.	ResCode does not allow variation of the parking standards.
General	**Community Values**. Generally this section may need further thought, ie H4 states "Friendly neighbours, sense of community". What does this mean? Not sure what is to be drawn from that.	The Community Values statements have been taken from the workshops and disposable cameras exercise. They are general statements that are meant to indicate the basic points about each area that people value and would like to see retained and enhanced.
	Policy Context. Draws standardised statements from the MSS as they are applicable to the particular precinct, but perhaps the title needs to be something else to enable the lay person reading it to see that there are some statements that are important specifically to their precinct from an overall planning control point of view.	The Policy Context is not included in the final brochure, rather it is background information for the Community Committee when considering the PIPs. The Preferred Character Statement will potentially be included as Planning Scheme Policy.
	Issues / Threats. This section needs to be more definitive. "High	The guidelines respond to the Issues / Threats raised in each

Precinct	Issues	Responses
	front fences" is fairly common, so why not "No high fences"?	precinct.
	Some precincts see a loss of a particular building style as a threat. Does this mean no support will be given for the removal of these buildings? Do not want the NCS to become a quasi-heritage control.	Council is only able to oppose demolition in a Heritage Overlay area, which is applied to specific parts of the City that have demonstrated heritage significance. Elsewhere, retention of older buildings may be encouraged through discussion, negotiation, education or market preferences.
	PIPs could state where development is encouraged in each precinct. Coordinate them more with the Housing Strategy.	The Neighbourhood Character Study will incorporate the findings of Council's Housing Distribution Strategy. 'Areas of investigation' where additional housing may be encouraged around Activity Centres will be noted in the Neighbourhood Character Study.

Appendix 6

Community Feedback to Precinct Issues Papers

Draft Guidelines : Consultation Summary

Summary of responses to the draft Guidelines received from the Community Committee (and others): April - May 2006

Issues	Responses
Guidelines are too vague, ambiguous, with not enough qualification or prescription.	Prescriptive requirements are included in planning scheme provisions of ResCode or overlay controls, where applied. These guidelines are intended to provide additional design objectives and rationale that articulate the neighbourhood character of the different areas of the municipality.
Precinct C2 - preferred character statement not strong enough. Suggested word change – 'utilise appropriate materials' should be 'materials commonly used in the neighbourhood'.	Noted and amended.
Guidelines relating to siting and building height in structure plan areas are not adequately clear. Need ratio to formulate acceptable heights/setbacks. A two storey height limit should be set. C2 is not located near an activity centre.	ResCode provides measurable heights and setbacks. Guidelines provide the more specific design objectives and rationale that relate to the neighbourhood character of different parts of the municipality. Precinct C2 is located along High Street but not in a structure plan area, so this reference will be removed. For Northcote and Preston, residential areas that are included in structure plans will be excluded from the NCS. Within these structure plan areas, around activity centres, detailed urban design frameworks have been completed and these specify appropriate building heights. In residential areas there is an existing height limit of 9m, which generally equates to two storeys.
Statements about 'cultural expression' and 'architectural innovation' are too subjective and will lead to 'open slather'.	These are considered appropriate design objectives and are applied to all areas. They do not suggest ill-considered or outlandish design, rather they are intended to encourage a high standard of contemporary architecture and expression – not architecture that merely copies existing styles or displays a lack of creative endeavour. Clearly, it is impossible to prescribe a formula to achieve this and ultimately decisions as to the appropriateness of a design response will always be

	subjective. A 'playing it safe' approach of requiring all new buildings to replicate the existing within every streetscape is not a means by which we can foster new, exemplary architecture in our cities.
Retention of existing dwellings in dual occupancy developments is desirable in terms of environment and streetscape. Could this be encouraged by allowing an accessway of less than 3m for dual occupancy developments, particularly if they are only single storey?	Incentives such as this were considered by the Committee at the meeting of 31st March to be a positive way of encouraging dual occupancies that retain existing dwellings. This will be recommended to council. Where sites have limited space at the rear of the dwelling, parts of the new building may need to be double storey in height.
Promotion of guidelines and NCS. Suggestions include a Darebin Expo, with local tradespeople, designers and planners, and design awards.	Very useful and positive suggestions. These will be added to the report's recommendations.
Existing character, community values, issues/threats etc. not included.	Final version of guidelines will include these sections.
Three categories used for precincts with many older or heritage listed buildings (ie existing buildings in HO, adjacent to HO) are putting too much emphasis on heritage control via these guidelines, when the HO provides protection for listed buildings.	See response below.
The Committee has different views on how the guidelines should deal with heritage or older buildings. • Some members of the Committee have stated concern that the guidelines are being used as a quasi heritage control and believe that if a building is not in a Heritage Overlay it should not be protected from demolition and prevent new development from occurring. • Other members of the Committee would like to see all older buildings kept, whether in or out of Heritage Overlay areas and are concerned that the guidelines do not go far enough in protecting these buildings.	Heritage Overlay (HO) is the only means by which buildings can be prevented from demolition. Even in a Heritage Overlay area, not all period buildings can be automatically retained – it is only those buildings that are listed as contributing to the significance of the area and are structurally sound that would be prevented from demolition. Outside of HO areas Council is only able to 'encourage' buildings to be retained through discussion, education and negotiation. While most people love older buildings, their retention is not always the best design outcome and the potential for new development to add value to a streetscape character must be allowed. One of the aims of the Neighbourhood Character Study is to promote a high quality of residential design. We need to allow for design innovation and progress and work with developers and designers to create the heritage of the future. In the 1920s there were probably people who thought Californian Bungalows were ghastly modern things! In addition, new development opens the opportunity for buildings to be constructed in a sustainable form. Older buildings do not have solar orientation and many are

	without insulation.
Too much emphasis on retaining or planting new substantial canopy trees, as well as setbacks and leaving garden space. The guidelines are to be used in assessing medium density housing. How can a greater density of development be achieved while allowing for trees and space?	Most residential areas will see only a moderate increase in density whereby new development can in most instances be designed around existing trees or provide space for trees to be planted. Guidelines will be amended to better define areas where planting of larger canopy trees is possible.
Support guideline's intention of avoiding buildings higher than two storey around High Street. Increased density in Darebin can be achieved without higher scale buildings. Supports subdivision of large blocks to create more housing (eg ex housing commission sites).	Noted.
Concern over high number of private vehicles on streets. Need to encourage/require carparking on-site, particularly where there is laneway access. Council should offer subsidies/rate relief for roller door or car stackers.	The NCS does not deal specifically with issues of traffic, however it can offer guidance on location, siting and design of car access and storage. Final guidelines/report will include more specific guidance in this regard.
Guidelines on vehicle access and storage should be included as they were in old guidelines.	Final guidelines will include reference to location of vehicle access and storage with words and illustrations.
Guidelines should have more prescriptive requirements on setbacks, siting and widths of garages. Darebin local laws should be included in planning scheme as they have more specific requirements on design and location of crossovers.	Guidelines are not intended to contain prescriptive requirements, but to add information about neighbourhood character objectives of the different precincts in Darebin. ResCode standards for access ways (B14) cannot be altered. The local laws policy relates to the public realm, whereas ResCode applies to private land. The NCS will include the design requirements of the local laws policy. Guidelines will stipulate the local condition of accessways to which new development must respond.
Doesn't agree with suggestion that B4 should be included in A4 or A5.	

Appendix 7

Community Feedback to Precinct Brochures and Guidelines

Draft Guidelines : Consultation Summary

Summary of responses to the draft Guidelines received from the Community Committee (and others): April - May 2006

Issues	Responses
Guidelines are too vague, ambiguous, with not enough qualification or prescription.	Prescriptive requirements are included in planning scheme provisions of ResCode or overlay controls, where applied. These guidelines are intended to provide additional design objectives and rationale that articulate the neighbourhood character of the different areas of the municipality.
Precinct C2 - preferred character statement not strong enough. Suggested word change – 'utilise appropriate materials' should be 'materials commonly used in the neighbourhood'.	Noted and amended.
Guidelines relating to siting and building height in structure plan areas are not adequately clear. Need ratio to formulate acceptable heights/setbacks. A two storey height limit should be set. C2 is not located near an activity centre.	ResCode provides measurable heights and setbacks. Guidelines provide the more specific design objectives and rationale that relate to the neighbourhood character of different parts of the municipality. Precinct C2 is located along High Street but not in a structure plan area, so this reference will be removed. For Northcote and Preston, residential areas that are included in structure plans will be excluded from the NCS. Within these structure plan areas, around activity centres, detailed urban design frameworks have been completed and these specify appropriate building heights. In residential areas there is an existing height limit of 9m, which generally equates to two storeys.
Statements about 'cultural expression' and 'architectural innovation' are too subjective and will lead to 'open slather'.	These are considered appropriate design objectives and are applied to all areas. They do not suggest ill-considered or outlandish design, rather they are intended to encourage a high standard of contemporary architecture and expression – not architecture that merely copies existing styles or displays a lack of creative endeavour. Clearly, it is impossible to prescribe a formula to achieve this and ultimately decisions as to the appropriateness of a design response will always be

subjective. A 'playing it safe' approach of requiring all new buildings to replicate the existing within every streetscape is not a means by which we can foster new, exemplary architecture in our cities.

Retention of existing dwellings in dual occupancy developments is desirable in terms of environment and streetscape. Could this be encouraged by allowing an accessway of less than 3m for dual occupancy developments, particularly if they are only single storey?	Incentives such as this were considered by the Committee at the meeting of 31st March to be a positive way of encouraging dual occupancies that retain existing dwellings. This will be recommended to council. Where sites have limited space at the rear of the dwelling, parts of the new building may need to be double storey in height.
Promotion of guidelines and NCS. Suggestions include a Darebin Expo, with local tradespeople, designers and planners, and design awards.	Very useful and positive suggestions. These will be added to the report's recommendations.
Existing character, community values, issues/threats etc. not included.	Final version of guidelines will include these sections.
Three categories used for precincts with many older or heritage listed buildings (ie existing buildings in HO, adjacent to HO) are putting too much emphasis on heritage control via these guidelines, when the HO provides protection for listed buildings.	See response below.
The Committee has different views on how the guidelines should deal with heritage or older buildings. • Some members of the Committee have stated concern that the guidelines are being used as a quasi heritage control and believe that if a building is not in a Heritage Overlay it should not be protected from demolition and prevent new development from occurring. • Other members of the Committee would like to see all older buildings kept, whether in or out of Heritage Overlay areas and are concerned that the guidelines do not go far enough in protecting these buildings.	Heritage Overlay (HO) is the only means by which buildings can be prevented from demolition. Even in a Heritage Overlay area, not all period buildings can be automatically retained – it is only those buildings that are listed as contributing to the significance of the area and are structurally sound that would be prevented from demolition. Outside of HO areas Council is only able to 'encourage' buildings to be retained through discussion, education and negotiation. While most people love older buildings, their retention is not always the best design outcome and the potential for new development to add value to a streetscape character must be allowed. One of the aims of the Neighbourhood Character Study is to promote a high quality of residential design. We need to allow for design innovation and progress and work with developers and designers to create the heritage of the future. In the 1920s there were probably people who thought Californian Bungalows were ghastly modern things! In addition, new development opens the opportunity for buildings to be constructed in a sustainable form. Older buildings do not have solar orientation and many are

	without insulation.
Too much emphasis on retaining or planting new substantial canopy trees, as well as setbacks and leaving garden space. The guidelines are to be used in assessing medium density housing. How can a greater density of development be achieved while allowing for trees and space?	Most residential areas will see only a moderate increase in density whereby new development can in most instances be designed around existing trees or provide space for trees to be planted.

Guidelines will be amended to better define areas where planting of larger canopy trees is possible. |
| Support guideline's intention of avoiding buildings higher than two storey around High Street. Increased density in Darebin can be achieved without higher scale buildings.

Supports subdivision of large blocks to create more housing (eg ex housing commission sites). | Noted. |
| Concern over high number of private vehicles on streets.

Need to encourage/require carparking on-site, particularly where there is laneway access.   Council should offer subsidies/rate relief for roller door or car stackers. | The NCS does not deal specifically with issues of traffic, however it can offer guidance on location, siting and design of car access and storage.   Final guidelines/report will include more specific guidance in this regard. |
| Guidelines on vehicle access and storage should be included as they were in old guidelines. | Final guidelines will include reference to location of vehicle access and storage with words and illustrations. |
| Guidelines should have more prescriptive requirements on setbacks, siting and widths of garages. Darebin local laws should be included in planning scheme as they have more specific requirements on design and location of crossovers. | Guidelines are not intended to contain prescriptive requirements, but to add information about neighbourhood character objectives of the different precincts in Darebin. ResCode standards for access ways (B14) cannot be altered.

The local laws policy relates to the public realm, whereas ResCode applies to private land.   The NCS will include the design requirements of the local laws policy. Guidelines will stipulate the local condition of accessways to which new development must respond. |
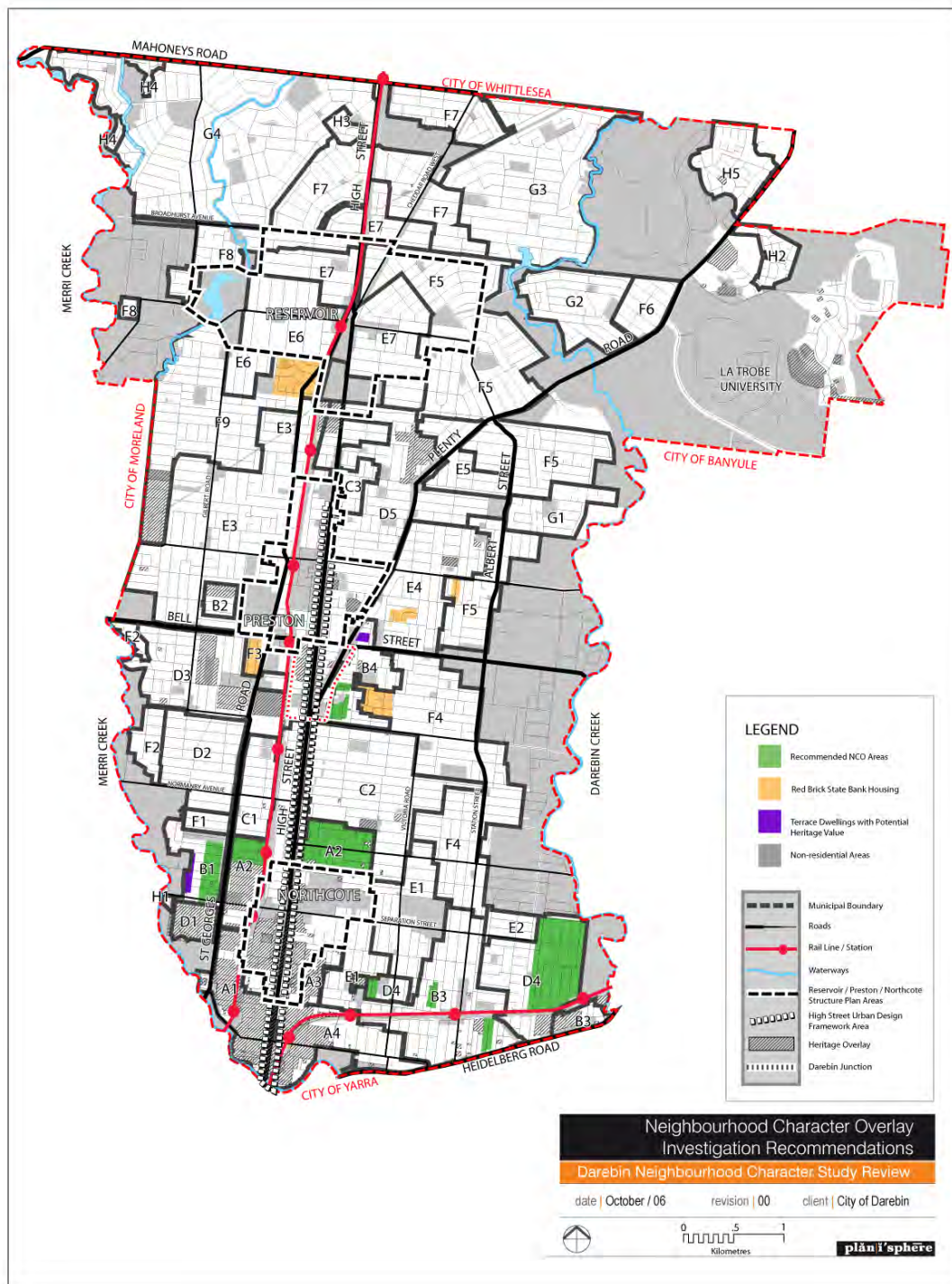| Doesn't agree with suggestion that B4 should be included in A4 or A5. | |

Appendix 8

Areas of special neighbourhood character

Areas of special neighbourhood character

The map below shows areas in Darebin that have been identified during the surveys as having special neighbourhood character. On the following page, the characteristics of each area is listed, along with those elements of buildings or surrounding spaces that may warrant protection in the future.

LEGEND

- Recommended NCO Areas
- Red Brick State Bank Housing
- Terrace Dwellings with Potential Heritage Value
- Non-residential Areas

- Municipal Boundary
- Roads
- Rail Line / Station
- Waterways
- Reservoir / Preston / Northcote Structure Plan Areas
- High Street Urban Design Framework Area
- Heritage Overlay
- Darebin Junction

Neighbourhood Character Overlay Investigation Recommendations
Darebin Neighbourhood Character Study Review

date | October / 06   revision | 00   client | City of Darebin

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Kilometres

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Precinct	Street / Area	Description	Elements to Protect
A2	Area east of High Street commercial area (excluding existing Heritage Overlay areas)	Contains intact Victorian and Edwardian dwellings in consistent streetscapes	Street Setbacks Building materials Front Fences
	Area west of the railway line (excluding existing Heritage Overlay areas)	Contains intact Victorian and Edwardian dwellings in consistent streetscapes	Street Setbacks Roof form
B1	Properties towards St Georges Road (exact boundary undefined)	Contains intact Victorian and Edwardian dwellings in consistent streetscapes	Street setbacks Roof form
	Woolhouse Street	Contains an intact row of Edwardian terraced dwellings May be of heritage significance – probably too small an area to quality as NCO	Street Setbacks Building materials Building Height Front Fences
B3	Broomfield Avenue	Contains intact and consistent Californian Bungalows and interwar dwellings	Street setbacks Vegetation (Street landscaping) Front Fences
	Stafford Street	Contains intact and consistent Californian Bungalows and an avenue of Plane trees	Street Setbacks Front Fences
B4	Livingston Street	Contains a row of single storey Victorian terrace dwellings May be of heritage significance – probably too small an area to quality as NCO	Building height (where visible from the street) Setbacks
	Raglan Street	Contains an intact row of Spanish style brick and render dwellings May be of heritage significance – probably too small an area to quality as NCO?	Building materials Front Fences
	Roxburgh Sreet and Larne Grove	Contains intact and consistent Californian Bungalows	Street Setbacks Landscaping Relationship with landscaping character of Adams Park
D4	Area bounded by Fulham Road, the railway line, Smith Street, and Yarana Road (excluding the northern side of Smith Street)	Contains intact and consistent Interwar dwellings (mostly Californian Bungalows) All streets have avenue plantings. Some have wide	Street Side setbacks Roof form Front fences

|			
		nature strips	Landscaping
		Most dwellings have generous front and side setbacks	Building materials
	Oxford Street	Contains intact and consistent Californian Bungalows	Street setbacks
			Side Setbacks
			Building materials
			Roof form
			Front Fences
E4	Walker Avenue and Sinnot Street	Contains intact State Bank / Commission red-brick housing	Building materials
			Front fences
		Dwellings are consistently small with generous setbacks and low or no front fences	Building Form
			Street Setbacks
			Side Setbacks
F3	Penola Street and Stokes Street	Contains intact State Bank / Commission red-brick housing	Building materials
			Front fences
		Dwellings are consistently small with generous setbacks and low or no front fences	Building Form
			Street Setbacks
			Side Setbacks
F4	Area west of Newcastle Street	Contains intact State Bank / Commission red-brick housing	Building materials
			Front fences
		Dwellings are consistently small with generous setbacks and low or no front fences	Building Form
			Street Setbacks
			Side Setbacks
F5	Banool Street	Contains intact State Bank / Commission red-brick housing	Building materials
			Front fences
		Dwellings are consistently small with generous setbacks and low or no front fences	Building Form
			Street Setbacks
			Side Setbacks
F9	Area north of Taylor Avenue	Contains intact State Bank / Commission red-brick housing	Building materials
			Front fences
		Dwellings are consistently small with generous setbacks and low or no front fences	Building Form
			Street Setbacks
			Side Setbacks

Appendix 9

Redevelopment sites

Strategic Redevelopment Sites

Five large sites were identified by Council for investigation as a part of this study. These sites are either currently zoned residential or potentially could convert to residential use. They are shown on the map below.

For each site an examination of the existing site context and conditions, as well as the statutory context has been undertaken. Considerations for new development are listed and suggested design parameters provided.
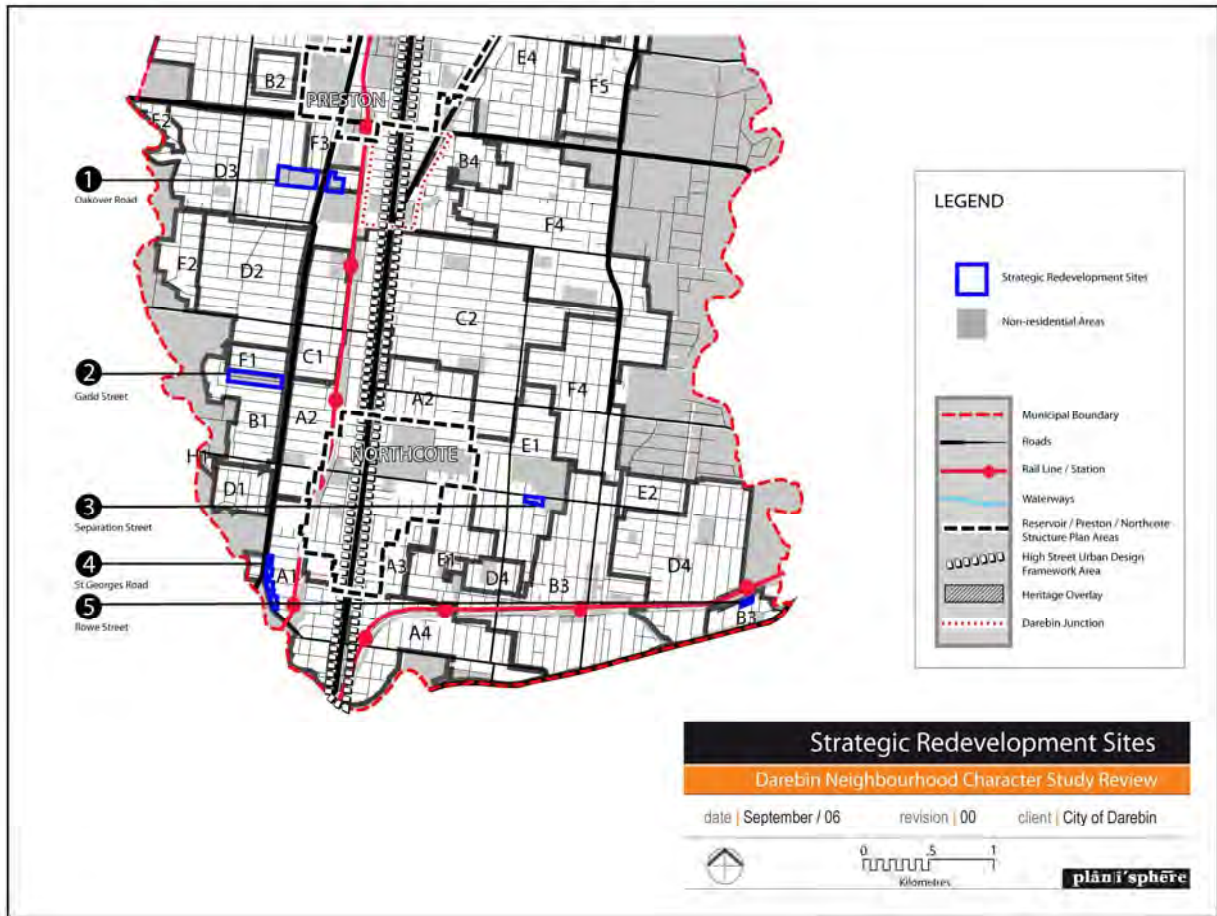
338-346 Separation Street (south side only), Northcote

Site context

The site is comprised of several individual properties. It has frontage to Separation Street and sideages to Boothby Street and French Avenue. It is zoned Residential 1.

The site is currently occupied by industrial/warehouse buildings between one and two storeys in height. The existing buildings would have higher floor-ceiling levels than a residential construction.

Front and side setbacks range from approximately 0 to 3m.

Immediately opposite the site to the north (between Boothby Street and French Avenue), and adjoining to the west and south are single storey dwellings of the interwar/postwar eras. All of these buildings have dominant pitched roof forms that create additional height.

The building at 350 Separation Street is located opposite other industrial buildings up to two storeys in height. It also has an important interface with the Rubie Thomson Reserve to the east.

Considerations for new development

Given the context of the site and its former industrial use, it is anticipated that a new residential development would have a form, scale and siting that is in marked contrast to the typical dwelling of the E1 precinct.

However, it is essential that new development is designed to respect the character and amenity of adjoining dwellings.

Therefore, the site conditions call for a design approach that offers a transitional height and form between the higher scale industrial properties and single storey residential properties adjoining the site on either side.

Suggested design parameters

The height of new buildings should generally match the existing buildings.

A higher scale form with a third storey element may be acceptable on the Separation Street frontage of the site, subject to an appropriate design response.

New buildings should offer a transitional scale to residential properties at the rear, with a two storey maximum residential height, combined with generous side setbacks.

New buildings could reflect frontage setbacks of the existing buildings, thereby continuing the pattern of reduced frontage setbacks along this section of Separation Street.

Adequate space should be provided on site for substantial landscaping that includes medium scale planting or canopy trees, where possible.

Any new development on the property abutting the Rubie Thomson Reserve should address this open space by providing adequate setbacks, low or permeable fences, and through the employment of passive surveillance techniques.

High quality contemporary design is essential. Both the residential buildings and industrial buildings have key design elements in common that could be adopted in a new development: use of bricks, rectilinear window compositions, flat wall surfaces that are articulated with variations in depth (as seen in the double or tripled fronted facades of the dwellings).

24 Leinster Grove and 48-72 Gadd Street (north side) and 47-85 Gadd Street (south side)

Site Context

Both sides of Gadd Street contain light industrial buildings surrounded by low-scale residential dwellings.

The area is currently zoned Industrial 3 (IN3Z).

At the eastern end of Gadd Street is St Georges Road however the industrial area is not visible from St Georges Road. The western end is flanked by residential dwellings which adjoin parkland associated with the Merri Creek however the industrial zone is not visible from the parkland.

To the south and west are the residential areas of Precinct B1, which, in this section, contain predominantly interwar timber dwellings.

To the north is the residential area of the F1 precinct, which contains immediate post-war cream brick dwellings.

Existing Buildings

Gadd Street is occupied by industrial buildings (some of which no longer appear to be in use) from the interwar era as well as the 1960s-70s.

Buildings range from one to three storeys in height.

There are also several large car parking areas as well as two un-developed areas at the eastern end of Gadd Street.

Buildings have either limited or no front setbacks.

Considerations for new development

While new buildings would need to respect the heights of surrounding dwellings and be particularly sensitive to the amenity of surrounding residential properties, the location of this area in between two precincts means that there may be an opportunity for new development to set a new character.

There is an opportunity for new development to be of a higher density, particularly fronting onto Gadd Street. Heights and building densities will need to decrease at the boundaries of the area, so as not to impact on the amenity of residential properties.

Some of these industrial buildings, particularly those constructed throughout the Interwar era, may have potential for conversion.

Suggested Design Parameters

Conversion of large scale existing buildings could result in multi-level residential accommodation of up to three storeys in height.

New buildings should offer a transitional scale with a single storey maximum height, adequate building setback and screen planting at the sensitive interface with abutting residential sites.

Where possible, consistent street setbacks in new development would offer a better sense of continuity along the street.

It is recommended that Council undertakes an assessment of the heritage value of the three storey buildings on no. 52 Gadd Street and, should they be found to be of heritage value, retention and re-use of the buildings is encouraged.

2-66 St Georges Road (eastern side only), 2 Charles Street, 38 and 40 Merri Parade, Northcote

Site Context

Sites north of Charles Street have a frontage to St Georges Road, while streets south of Charles Street have a frontage onto Merri Parade. Sites located on a corner have sideages to one of Gordon Grove, Clarke Street, Charles Street, Bridge Street or Union Street. All sites are zoned Industrial 3 (IN3Z).

A large portion of the industrial and surrounding residential area is located within the Heritage Overlay (HO), excluding properties between Clarke Street and Charles Street and properties at no. 2 Merri Parade.

Properties north of Charles Street front onto one of the most heavily trafficked parts of St Georges Rd, which is quite wide at this location. The road's median contains a bike path, a nature strip on both sides of the bike path and tram lines in both directions. On both sides of the median are two lanes of traffic. Across St Georges Road are residential properties which are located in Precinct A1, and consist of small scale Victorian and Edwardian dwellings.

Properties south of Charles Street front onto the less trafficked Merri Parade. Across Merri Parade is a large area of parkland associated with the Merri Creek.

Residential properties are located on the western side of the industrial area, and form part of the A1 precinct, which comprises small scale Victorian and Edwardian dwellings.

Existing Buildings

Existing building styles are mixed, with buildings from the Victorian, Edwardian and more recent eras. They are also of varied scale and form, and include single storey Victorian and Edwardian cottages, warehouse type buildings from different eras, buildings that would have once functioned as corner stores and the three-storey Victorian style Albion Charles Hotel. There are also some grade-level car parks throughout.

The majority of buildings are set on the building frontage, creating a wall to the street. Buildings that function as dwellings have small street setbacks, and some properties have car parking at the front of the site.

Although there are many intact buildings of heritage significance, buildings outside the HO are generally in poor condition and provide an opportunity for complete redevelopment.

Considerations for new development

Buildings of heritage significance should generally be retained and/or adapted. All new development will need to be respectful of adjoining heritage buildings.

New development north of Charles Street would probably have a low impact on residential properties on the western side of St Georges Road, due to the width and heavily trafficked nature of St Georges Road.

The Merri Creek and associated open space presents a sensitive interface that would need to be considered in the design of new development. New buildings should improve the amenity of the area south of Charles Street with buildings and garden spaces that address the open space and provide passive surveillance.

It is essential that any new development is respectful of the scale and amenity of residential properties to the east of the area.

Suggested Design Parameters

Sites in this area provide an opportunity for redevelopment. The scale of development could be increased in locations fronting St Georges Road and Merri Parade, however, buildings should be scaled down at the eastern residential interface to single storey construction with adequately landscaped setbacks.

There is potential to redevelop the site on the north-east corner of St Georges Road and Charles Street to provide an important gateway to the municipality. Buildings on this site could range in height up to four storeys.

Adequate space should be provided on these sites for substantial landscaping, particularly south of Charles Street.

32, 34, 36, 40, 54, 56, 58, 60A, 62, 68, 70 Oakover Road, 2 Austral Avenue, 1 and 3 Newman Street, 32 St Georges Road

Site Context

This large industrial area is located on the eastern and western sides of St Georges Road, and is bounded by Erin Street at the west, Stott Street and Showers Street at the north, and Oakover Road at the south. Newman Street and Austral Avenue run in a north-south direction through the area.

The entire area is zoned Mixed Use (MUZ). The open space bounded by Newman Street, Showers Street, St Georges Road and Oakover Road is zoned Public Parks and Recreation (PPRZ).

West of St Georges Road, most of the surrounding residential area is located in Precinct D3, which generally comprises low-scale Interwar dwellings. Stokes and Penola Streets are located in Precinct F3, which is dominated by post-war dwellings.

East of St Georges Road, the area is surrounded by Interwar residential buildings to the north and east (also in the D3 precinct), and a large metropolitan tram depot to the south.

Existing Buildings

No. 70 Oakover Road is currently vacant.

Development between Austral Avenue and Newman Street generally consists of industrial buildings from the post-war and 1960s-70s eras. These buildings appear to be clustered on the site, with some buildings facing inwards, and others fronting onto residential areas.

No. 40 Road is dominated by Interwar industrial buildings with a saw-tooth roof form, which front onto St Georges Road.

No. 32 Oakover Road contains a more recently constructed industrial building, with its frontage dominated by car parking.

There are a number of grade-level car parking areas and vacant portions of sites throughout.

Buildings are predominantly one to two storeys in height.

Considerations for new development

New development should seek to provide a greater level of amenity for existing residential buildings at the northern boundary of the area, which directly adjoin the existing industrial area and currently have a poor level of amenity. At the southern residential interface, new development should be sensitive to the existing scale and amenity of residential buildings.

New buildings located along Newman Street should address the open space to the east, with private garden space along Newman Street and opportunities for passive surveillance.

There are limited interfaces with sensitive uses along the southern side of Oakover Road, east of St Georges Road, providing an opportunity for new development up to three storeys in height. Any new development should, however, be respectful of neighbouring residential development located in Kenwood Court and Showers Street.

Due to the large depth of most of these sites, there is an opportunity for development to graduate towards the middle of sites.

Suggested Design Parameters

New building heights at the site boundary should be no greater than two storeys. Towards the middle of larger sites, buildings could graduate in height up to four storeys in height.

Portions of the site on the eastern side of St Georges Road could accommodate higher scale development up to five storeys in height along the St Georges Road boundary, given the width of the road reservation.

Council should aim to upgrade the open space bounded by Newman Street, Showers Street, St Georges Road and Oakover Road in order to provide the area with a better outlook and a greater level of amenity.

There is limited opportunity to adapt or convert existing industrial buildings therefore, new development should be of a high quality, contemporary design and should acknowledge the established and preferred neighbourhood character and heritage significance of nearby areas.

7-25 Rowe Street

Site Context

This small light industrial area has been rezoned to Residential 1 (R1Z).

On the northern side of Rowe Street is Alphington Railway Station.

The eastern, southern and western boundaries of the area are flanked by small scale residential buildings within the precinct B3, which is dominated by Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar dwellings.

Miller Street, to the south-west of the area, contains intact dwellings from the Edwardian and Interwar eras and is located within the Heritage Overlay (HO) The site on the corner of Rowe and Miller Street is also within the HO.

Existing Buildings

Existing buildings include a period style restaurant in good condition, on the corner of Yarralea and Rowe Street, two Interwar/post-war warehouses that are located at an angle to the street and two vacant lots at the western end of Rowe Street.

Considerations for new development

Plans and permits for nine apartments (three storeys in height) have been approved for no.19 Rowe Street. If constructed, these buildings will set a new and design and character standard for the area.

Any new development would need to be respectful of the adjoining HO area and the amenity and scale of all surrounding residential dwellings.

Suggested Design Parameters

There is an opportunity for new development to graduate in height towards the railway station (up to a maximum of three storeys). New buildings should be no more than two storeys in height at the rear.

New buildings should be set on an angle to the street to maintain an element of continuity.

There is minimal opportunity to retain or adapt existing buildings. Therefore all new development should be of a high quality contemporary design.

New development should incorporate adequate space for small-scale landscaping.