

21.01 INTRODUCTION

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21.01-1 Municipal Snapshot

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The City of Darebin is an established urban municipality of 53 square kilometres across the inner to middle northern suburbs of Melbourne, extending from 4 kilometres north of Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD) at Northcote and Fairfield, through to Reservoir, Bundoora and Macleod a further 10 kilometres to the north. The municipality is bordered by the City of Yarra to the south, City of Whittlesea to the north, City of Moreland and Merri Creek to the west and City of Banyule and Darebin Creek to the east.

Darebin is one of the largest communities in Victoria, with over 55,000 properties, including more than 58,000 residences and 4700 commercial and industrial properties. It is also one of the most diverse, made up of people from a range of backgrounds, cultures, languages, religions, ages, socio-economic status, levels of ability, interests, expectations and aspirations. Darebin is also recognised as an important area of indigenous history, and has the second largest Aboriginal community within the Melbourne metropolitan area.

The built environment in Darebin reflects the City's early Victorian beginnings in Northcote and the Preston Township, to various early 20th century bursts of expansion, post-war development in Reservoir, Kingsbury and East Preston, to the recent redevelopment of former state institutional areas in Bundoora and Macleod. The City has an established network of activity centres with key precincts at Preston, Northland, Northcote and Reservoir complemented by a range of neighbourhood and local centres.

Major retail areas include Northland Shopping Centre and Northland Homemaker Centre, Preston Central and Preston Market, Northcote Plaza, and High Street at Westgarth, Northcote and Thornbury. There are major industrial areas located in Fairfield, East Preston and Reservoir. Darebin also has two tertiary institutions, La Trobe University and Melbourne Polytechnic, and major health facilities at Bundoora Extended Care and Reservoir Private Hospital.

Although highly urbanised, Darebin accommodates regionally significant open space areas at Bundoora Park and Darebin Parklands, and important habitat areas at Central Creek Grasslands and Gresswell Wildlife Reserve. Substantial parklands and pockets of remnant natural areas along Merri and Darebin Creek borders are significant ecological and Aboriginal cultural heritage areas. Edwardes Lake Park in Reservoir and All Nations Park in Northcote are popular urban parkland destinations for leisure and recreation, and are complemented by a network of local and neighbourhood parks.

At the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, Darebin's official resident population was 143,057. Growth is forecast at 1.06% per annum to reach 173,980 people by 2031, an extra 30,900 people or 21.6% increase overall. Population growth to date has come predominantly through migration into Darebin from other suburbs in Melbourne and from overseas, and this trend is expected to continue.

In 2012 retail was the largest sector in employment. Manufacturing remained the largest sector by value added (\$575 million) and output (\$1,746 million). The public sector continues to be a major employer, providing jobs in the three tiers of government, primary and secondary schools, tertiary education institutions and within health facilities.

Darebin is an increasingly desirable place to live, gaining popularity as a destination for retail, leisure and entertainment, and being well positioned to take advantage of its proximity to employment, recreation and entertainment opportunities in the Melbourne CBD, as well as those in neighbouring inner and outer metropolitan municipalities.

The City of Darebin has experienced significant change demographically, economically and physically over the last decade, primarily driven by a gradual but consistent change in its socio-economic make up towards a more affluent population. Increasing affluence through gentrification is established in the southern half of the municipality (Northcote, Thornbury, Fairfield and Alphington) and progressing north into Preston, Reservoir and Bundoora. Gentrification is having a major impact on land use and development patterns.

21.01-2 Key Influences

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The key influences in relation to the City of Darebin are:

Population Growth and Change

- Gentrification of suburbs has increased house prices and levels of residential development activity.
- Strong population growth and demographic change has placed pressure on existing housing stock to meet the needs of the future population.
- Ageing families and declining household sizes are placing pressure on housing supply as fewer people occupy more housing.
- Demand for housing in general has put pressure on housing affordability for existing and prospective residents.
- Increased population has also put pressure on infrastructure, contributing to congestion on transport routes and greater competition for car parking.

Economic Structural Shift

- Darebin's economy is transitioning from a 'traditional' labour intensive manufacturing industrial base to a more mixed economy, with growth in modern retail and services sectors.
- Local employment in manufacturing and other traditional industries is being replaced by jobs in retail and services.
- The departure or scaling down of traditional industrial (due to factors such as high land costs, preference for smaller premises and conflicts with sensitive uses such as housing) has created pockets of vacant underutilised industrial land across the City.
- Growth in 'lifestyle' businesses, particularly in hospitality, arts and entertainment, in activity centres and retail strips reflect the socio-economic uplift of Darebin's neighbourhoods.

Environmental Challenges

- Direct physical environment, economic and social health impacts of climate change.
- Additional parallel pressures, including loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation, resource depletion and security (including peak oil) and food security.
- Fundamental cultural and social changes, which need to occur if the worst impacts of climate change and other environmental challenges are to be avoided.

21.01-3 Regional Context

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Melbourne is experiencing relatively high population growth, mostly accommodated in growth corridors extending up to 45 kilometres north and west from the central city. However, significant growth is also occurring in established inner and middle areas, such as Darebin.

The growth of Melbourne presents long term challenges in retaining the city's liveability and productivity. A key issue is the continued concentration of jobs and associated activity in the central city, which is contributing to increasing congestion on roads and public transport in Darebin, and reduced local productivity and liveability.

In addition to substantial, integrated investment in transport and infrastructure in both established and growth areas to support changing development patterns and reduce lengthy and often car-based commuting, key opportunities in Darebin to tackle this issue include:

- Transformation of land through the redevelopment of brownfield and greyfield sites into vibrant mixed use precincts that can accommodate a range of employment opportunities for people in the northern region, closer to where they live.
- Growth in the knowledge economy through investment in the education, health, biomedical and research sectors. This can supplement the traditional retail and service centres and promote a shift to create more jobs in the suburbs.
- The emerging La Trobe National Employment Cluster, centred around La Trobe University, Northland East Preston Activity Centre, and the Austin/Heidelberg medical precinct and activity centre, is a key opportunity to grow the knowledge economy beyond its central Melbourne focus, and provide more accessible employment opportunities in the northern Melbourne region.

21.01-4 Issues for the Future

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Following on from key local and regional influences identified above, the key issues facing Darebin, focussed around four strategic themes, are:

Environment

- Minimising negative impacts from land use and development on natural environmental assets, particularly creek and habitat corridors, and open spaces like Bundoora Park.
- Protection and enhancement of places of heritage significance.
- Developing strategies to ensure new development exhibits good design and contributes to liveable and environmentally sustainable built environments.
- Management of environmental risks in the natural and built and environment.

Housing

- Facilitation of well-designed housing to meet anticipated housing needs, both in terms of number and diversity.
- Managing the impacts of new housing development on the amenity of existing neighbourhoods.
- Provision of affordable, social and accessible housing in Darebin.
- Risks of social exclusion regarding access to local employment, essential services and leisure and recreational facilities, particularly in areas of entrenched socio-economic disadvantage.

Economic Development

- Facilitating supply of land for business investment, particularly those that can provide job opportunities for local residents.
- Future planning of core industrial employment precincts, including broadening the range of suitable employment options in these precincts.
- Best utilisation of vacant or underperforming industrial and commercial land in the municipality to attract investment, new business and employment opportunities.
- Managing interfaces and potential conflicts between commercial and industrial land uses and residential land uses.
- Providing space and flexibility in land use controls and decision making for business start-ups and home-based businesses.
- Maximising investment and employment opportunities around La Trobe University.

Transport and Infrastructure

- Integration of land use and transport planning to encourage sustainable transport use and reduce car dependency and associated road congestion and parking pressures.
- Effective and efficient planning and delivery of infrastructure, including transport, essential services, community facilities, and open space to meet existing and future demand.
- Equity of transport and infrastructure investment across the municipality, particularly in areas of entrenched social disadvantage.
- Promotion of urban renewal opportunities resulting from rail grade separation investments at Bell Street and Reservoir Junction.

21.01-5 Strategic Vision

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The City of Darebin Council Plan 2013-2017 sets a vision for the municipality as “*Darebin, the place to live*” which is to be realised through Council’s mission of “*Working with our diverse community to build a sustainable and liveable city*”.

This is expanded on as follows:

“Darebin, the Place to Live is a place where people feel a sense of belonging, are healthy and connected to their environment and neighbourhood, feel and are safe and free from discrimination and violence, have access to shelter, transport and fresh food. It is a place where our citizens are engaged and actively involved in shaping the decisions of their representative government. It is where people’s creativity has room to be explored and shared for all to enjoy and celebrate. It is where vibrant economies thrive and niche markets flourish. It is where everyone is respected and valued, and, the services people need are available, affordable, accessible and inclusive. It is also a place where the satisfaction of our present needs are sustainable, that is our needs are met without compromising likely similar needs of those in future generations.”

Goals set by the Council Plan to achieve this vision involve working towards a future that promotes:

- A vibrant city and innovative economy, with physical infrastructure that is both well maintained and appropriately regulated;
- A physical, social and economic environment that supports and enhances community health and wellbeing;
- A safe, inclusive and equitable community where all feel socially well connected, respected and valued;
- Sustainable and resilient neighbourhoods as part of achieving rapid transition to an environmentally sustainable city; and
- A thriving artistic and creative culture that supports economic prosperity and enhances social connections, sense of inclusion, pride of place, and cultural tourism.

21.01-6 Strategic Framework Plan

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The Strategic Framework Plan sets out the general pattern for land use and development to respond to the key influences, issues affecting the municipality and opportunities that can be delivered to achieve the Strategic Vision. The purpose of the framework plan is to identify locations where specific land use and development outcomes will be supported and promoted.

Key strategic directions identified in the Strategic Framework Plan include:

- Enhanced network of activity centres, with preferred economic and land use roles;

- Distinctive and attractive strategic corridors in response to different physical contexts;
- Regionally-significant land uses to support and intensify, including La Trobe University, Melbourne Polytechnic and areas within the Emerging La Trobe Employment Cluster;
- Areas identified as strategic locations to maximise opportunities for 'urban intensification' through higher density building forms accommodating a range of residential and commercial uses;
- Industrial zoned areas that will provide a key employment and value-added role;
- Major landscape features to be protected and enhanced, including areas of biological significance, regionally significant recreational open space and key vistas;
- Major transport links and future priorities for transport infrastructure investment; and
- Relationships and access to key destinations in adjoining municipalities to achieve mutual benefits for the community.

Separate land use framework plans have been prepared for major land use elements identified in Clauses 21.02-21.05. These plans cumulatively form the basis of the Strategic Framework Plan.

Activity Centres

A key element in the future development vision for Darebin as places for urban intensification, taking advantage of capacity for development, existing facilities, access to employment and public transport services.

Consolidation of higher density residential uses in and around activity centres, at a scale appropriate to its role and physical context, is encouraged to support retail and commercial uses and provide a diversity of housing to meet community needs.

Structure plans provide detailed directions for land use and development for Darebin's larger activity centres, and are implemented in this Planning Scheme through various zone, overlay and local policy controls.

Preston Central

- One of largest 'traditional, multi-dimensional' activity centres in northern Melbourne and a major focus for business, shopping, community, culture and recreation. Land use and development is guided by the Preston Central Structure Plan.
- Activities that maintain the regional significance of Preston Central and take advantage of opportunities for retail and residential activities in the centre at greater scale and intensity are encouraged.

Northland East Preston

- Provides a range of opportunities for retail, commercial, residential, leisure, and other commercial activities for a wide catchment. Significant urban renewal opportunity exists in large parcels of underutilised industrial and commercial land.
- A structure plan is being prepared to transition the area to a more intense employment and higher density residential precinct as part of the Emerging La Trobe Employment Cluster.

Northcote

- Provides a mix of retail, leisure, cultural, educational and other commercial activities and is a popular destination in the inner northern Melbourne region, drawing a catchment area beyond the local population.

Reservoir

- Located at the intersection of High Street, Edwardes Street, Broadway and Spring Street, fulfils a predominantly neighbourhood centre role and is dominated by the central junction of major roads and the South Morang railway line.
- The Reservoir Structure Plan seeks to elevate Reservoir's role within Darebin's retail hierarchy and advocates grade separation of the road and rail to create a 'central heart' to unify the precinct and unlock opportunities for new community, commercial and residential investment.

La Trobe University (and associated research and development facilities)

- Provides a major education, research and employment hub for the municipality and broader region. Key part of the Emerging La Trobe Employment Cluster.
- Council supports the continued development and promotion of the precinct, particularly in ways which can grow employment and enhance the university's connection to and integration with surrounding neighbourhoods and local communities.

Neighbourhood Centres and Local Centres

- Neighbourhood centres at Fairfield, The Junction - South Preston, Tyler Street, Summerhill Village, Thornbury Village, Westgarth Village and Lancaster Gate, and 55 local centres, providing convenience retail needs of local catchments and space for small business.
- Land use and development that supports local living and revitalisation is generally encouraged. This may include new shops and services, improved pedestrian links, higher-density housing in and around the centres, public realm improvements and programs to promote local purchasing.

Strategic Corridors

Strategic corridors formed by major road routes and adjoining land play a significant role in serving the commercial, social and residential needs of the community. Strategic planning of these areas should aim to strengthen their economic, social and residential role.

The Framework Plan identifies three general types of strategic corridors in Darebin which recognise their physical differences (transport role, width and configuration of road space, land use and subdivision pattern of surrounding development) and ongoing role:

Boulevard – a wide, multi-lane thoroughfare, divided by a central median with road space along each side. Often has above-average quality landscaping and scenery.

Urban – multi-lane thoroughfare generally not divided by central median, with landscaping (if any) confined to the kerbside.

Interface – thoroughfare that forms the municipal boundary, with development in Darebin on one side and in an adjoining municipality on the other. Urban character, land uses and public realm treatments often vary from side of the road to another.

High Street

- North-south urban corridor that supports one of Melbourne's longest retail and commercial strips. Sections of the corridor are serviced by tram and bus. Connects activity centres at Northcote, Preston Central and Reservoir.
- The High Street corridor has significant potential for intensification of retail, commercial, office, and residential uses.

Plenty Road

- Regional transport route, accommodating tram route 86, linking the inner metropolitan area to La Trobe University and the growth areas north of Darebin. Changes from an urban corridor environment at Preston into a wide boulevard at Reservoir/Bundoora.
- Is envisaged to accommodate a mix of commercial and higher density residential development to support more efficient and accessible public transport. This will support revitalised activity centres at The Junction – South Preston, Tyler Street, Summerhill Village and Lancaster Gate, and support La Trobe University.

St Georges Road

- Boulevard corridor with multiple infrastructure roles, providing transport (arterial road, tram route, regional cycling link) and metropolitan water supply and communications.
- Is envisaged to transition to a more intensive mix of uses, especially residential. The corridor will evolve and build on the strengths of each precinct's local character and activity to enhance the sense of place and vitality of the corridor. Includes the emerging Oakover Village Activity Centre as place for mixed use renewal.

Bell Street

- Major east-west arterial road of regional significance and Darebin's busiest road, providing a high exposure frontage for business and commercial uses.
- The section of Bell Street that extends through Darebin has a boulevard configuration and opportunities for streetscape enhancements to improve amenity and sense of place.
- Is envisaged to develop a greater mix of land uses, including employment and housing in various contexts, at a range of densities.
- Council advocates for grade separation of the road and rail at Bell Station to address congestion on Bell Street and opportunities for transit-oriented development.

Heidelberg Road and Mahoneys Road

- Key east-west transport routes and interfaces to adjoining municipalities. Both corridors attract commercial activity due to frontage exposure.
- Heidelberg Road is experiencing a greater rate of change with renewal of industrial land for a mix of uses.

Further strategic work is required in these corridors.

Strategic Redevelopment Precincts

These are specific areas earmarked to accommodate significant levels of new development, generally at a higher intensity and density.

Strategic planning of these areas should harness the higher capacity for development and encourage new housing at a range of densities, as well as commercial and recreational uses as appropriate to service existing and emerging communities.

The Junction – South Preston

- Identified as a key urban renewal area transitioning from predominantly industrial land to a higher density mixed use precinct. The area is characterised by a mix of commercial, retail and industrial properties fronting Plenty Road and High Street.
- Tram service along Plenty Road, Thornbury and Bell train stations within short walk, and proximity to Preston Central and High Street Thornbury enhances the Junction's suitability for higher density developments and opportunities for affordable housing.

Summerhill Village

- Identified for redevelopment and regeneration to create an improved neighbourhood centre, upgrading existing post-war retail developments, most of which are at the end of their commercial life, to a vibrant and viable modern 'town centre' layout and form.
- Redevelopment is envisaged to include greater integration of land uses, and intensification of urban form with new housing opportunities. Increased residential activity in the precinct will support and complement the neighbourhood centre retail role.

Oakover Village

- Identified as an emerging new neighbourhood centre, centred around the St Georges Road Strategic Corridor.

- Council envisages a coordinated and staged redevelopment of several key sites to create a high-amenity urban village, with new commercial opportunities and higher density residential development. This leverages the locational advantages of the precinct in relation to public transport (train and tram routes), and local facilities such as Ray Bramham Gardens and the Northern Metropolitan Institute of Melbourne Polytechnic Preston Campus.

Objectives, Strategies and Implementation

The land use planning vision for Darebin will aim to balance response to issues and influences affecting the municipality as described in Clause 21.01 with representation of community values and goals, and broader municipal social, environmental and economic goals such as those in the Council Plan.

However, the vision for the purposes of this Municipal Strategic Statement must remain focussed on matters that can be achieved through land use planning, and be consistent with the objectives and strategies of the State Planning Policy Framework.

The following land use planning vision is expressed under four interrelated key land use elements – Environment, Housing, Economic Development and Transport and Infrastructure – reflecting the key issues facing the municipality. The key elements provide a basis for more detailed objectives, strategies and implementation measures set out in Clauses 21.02-21.05. Each element has been divided into the following sections:

Overview	Provides a context and discussion of how issues have been addressed.
Objectives	The general aims or ambitions for the future use and development of an area responding to key issues identified, i.e. What Council wants to achieve
Strategies	The process by which the current situation will be moved towards its desired future to meet the objectives, i.e. How Council will achieve the objectives
Implementation	The means by which the strategies will be implemented.

The Implementation section has been divided into four parts

<i>Policy Guidelines</i>	The means of implementing strategies by use of local policies and the exercise of discretion in decision making under the planning scheme.
<i>Application of zones and overlays</i>	The means of implementing strategies through the application of zones, overlays and their accompanying schedules.
<i>Further strategic work</i>	The means of implementing strategies through further strategic work.
<i>Other actions</i>	The means of implementing strategies through other actions of Council.

All objectives, strategies and means of implementation must be read in context with those contained in the other elements and the other relevant sections of the scheme.

There are many objectives that may fall into more than one element, however each has been included in the most relevant element to avoid repetition.