

Strategic Context

2

2.4 Strategic Planning and policy context for Box Hill

2.4.1 Municipal Strategic Statement

The Municipal Strategic Statement at Clause 21 of the Planning Scheme sets out the overall strategic directions to manage future growth and development within the City of Whitehorse. It is to be read in conjunction with Council's Council Plan. It identifies three key strategic issues that need to be addressed: Environment, Settlement (housing) and Economic Development, and provides the overarching strategic framework plan for the City of Whitehorse.

Key strategic directions of particular relevance to Box Hill include:

Settlement

Clause 21.06 Housing which sets out the Vision for housing as: "To ensure that housing in the City of Whitehorse meets residents' needs in terms of location, diversity, sustainability, accessibility, affordability and good design." It also identifies the need to:

- Accommodate nearly 13,000 additional residents (as at 2014),
- Ensure activity centres can accommodate additional housing growth and are the focus of increased housing and employment densities, public transport and service provision.
- Better utilising transport corridors including train and tram routes for medium and higher density housing
- The need to develop or implement Structure Plans with objectives to improve housing affordability and special needs housing opportunities in activity centres

It provides specific objectives and strategies relating to housing location, housing diversity, housing affordability, housing design, and includes the 2007 Structure Plan and Whitehorse Housing Strategies as a Reference Documents. The Housing Framework Plan identifies much of the land within Box Hill as 'Significant Change Area'. Objectives set out for these areas (Clause 21.06-3) include:

- Support increased residential densities.
- Support increased housing choice by allowing for a diversity of dwelling types, sizes and tenures to suit a range of household types.
- Facilitate achieving a new, preferred character for these areas over time through quality developments.
- Support the master planning of larger sites to facilitate the development of diverse, high amenity precincts which have an identifiable sense of place.
- Encourage the provision of shop-top dwellings and low scale apartment developments in activity centres, particularly within key Neighbourhood Activity Centres and on sites abutting the Principal Public Transport Network and main roads.
- Provide space for planting, communal spaces and rooftop gardens to improve the amenity and liveability of dwellings.

Other key strategies include:

- Promote activity centres with high accessibility that offer a range of services and provide a high level of amenity to residents as key locations for housing diversity. (Clause 21.06-4)
- Continue to identify opportunities for affordable housing in designated structure plans including specific location, localised need and design, and incentives for developers. (Clause 21.06-5)
- Prepare and adopt design guidelines for identified opportunity sites to ensure their redevelopment positively contributes to their surrounding context, provides high quality and innovative building design and facilitates high levels of residential amenity for new and adjoining residents. (Clause 21.06-6)
- Clause 21.04 directs that it is policy to ensure that all development applications are assessed in accordance with the residential Development Policy at Clause 22.03

Economic Development

Clause 21.07 Economic Development states in the overview:

Plan Melbourne identifies Box Hill as a Metropolitan Activity Centre (MAC) which provides significant opportunities for investment in terms of retail, public transport, health, justice, education, entertainment and medium and higher density residential development. It is essential that the Box Hill MAC develops as a major regional activity centre through the development of appropriate retail and office activities. It is also vital that the centre develops more residential and entertainment facilities to strengthen this role. Council will support new commercial, residential and retail development in this Activity Centre consistent with the role of the centre and the Box Hill Structure Plan which also seeks to guide the preferred location and urban form of the new investment in the centre

Key strategic objectives at Clause 21.07-3 include:

- *To develop the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre as the major focus for retail, commercial, health, transport, education and entertainment facilities in Melbourne's east.*
- *To ensure that all shopping centres and civic spaces are safe, attractive and are developed in accordance with their role.*
- *To recognise the important regional role that our tertiary education and health sectors fulfil and provide support for the ongoing viability of these vital institutions such that they are positioned as leading industry providers.*
- *To maintain the City's position as the second largest provider of office space outside St Kilda Road and the Melbourne Central Business District.*
- *To promote the City as a prominent location for leading edge and international IT firms and harness the skills and capabilities of our IT sector to ensure that our other key sectors in manufacturing, health and education continually have access to and apply state-of-the-art technology.*

- *To ensure additional retail floorspace allows for improved access to retail goods and services by members of the community and supports the planned role and function of the activity centre and its place in the retail hierarchy.*
- *To encourage innovation in retailing and promote new retail formats where it can be demonstrated that consumer trends are evolving.*
- *To ensure Activity Centre development encourages a more effective use of public transport and cycling modes of transport.*
- *To increase participation in the cultural and recreational tourism of the City and facilitate the provision of entertainment, arts, cultural, recreational and leisure facilities and promoting these locally and regionally.*
- *To provide a nurturing environment for our homebased business sector that provides access to business planning and information services, and networking opportunities.*
- *To support, where appropriate, the transition to local commercial premises where operations of home based businesses are no longer suited to residential locations.*
- *To encourage the continued enhancement and use of public transport and cycling modes of transport.*

This clause specifically directs that all use and development in Box Hill and surrounds complies with the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre Policy at Clause 22.07. It includes the 2007 *Structure Plan*, Whitehorse Housing Strategy 2014, and Economic Development Strategy 2008-2013 as Reference Documents.

Infrastructure

Clause 21.08 sets out strategic directions for infrastructure across the City of Whitehorse. Key issues identified include:

- *Land use and transport planning needs to be integrated with development around public transport facilities designed to ensure maximum utilisation*
- *Providing improved facilities and safety for cyclists, pedestrians and public transport users, and maximising accessibility for all users but particularly the elderly, disabled and people with prams and young children is important. This includes upgrading the functionality, appearance, comfort, security and way-finding at the Box Hill Transport Interchange.*
- *Council needs to further investigate the opportunities to introduce Development Contributions to ensure that appropriate facilities are provided where new development is occurring within the City.*
- *Council has the responsibility to utilise open space contributions to help meet its future open space needs. Land contributions will be taken in certain areas where there is an opportunity to improve existing open space linkages and provision in accordance with Clause 22.15.*
- *To support walking as the primary means of access in and around Box Hill and encourage most trips of 1km or less to be taken on foot.*
- *To encourage cycling as a sustainable and healthy means of travel within Box Hill and for trips of up to 5km between the Activity Centre and surrounding areas.*
- *To encourage significantly increased use of public transport and reduced rates in the use of private vehicular transport for travel to and from the Box Hill Activity Centre.*
- *To carefully manage vehicular traffic in Box Hill to support choice of travel mode and create transit supportive roads (as defined by the 2007 Structure Plan).*
- *To ensure that car parking in Box Hill balances access, sustainable transport and land use needs, consistent with the Box Hill Central Activities Area Car Parking Strategy 2013.*
- *To ensure that Box Hill accommodates a more intensive and diverse range of activities that increase choices and opportunities, support synergies between different uses, encourage use of sustainable transport and complement surrounding areas.*
- *To ensure that development and use in the Box Hill Transport and Retail Precinct are appropriate to its role and function as a regional transport interchange for rail, bus, tram and taxi services.*

2.4.2 Planning Policy Clause 22.07 – Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre

Clause 22.07 'Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre' applies to land in Box Hill (in the area defined within the structure plan boundary) to implement the 2007 Structure Plan.

Policy objectives include:

- *To ensure that the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre can continue to expand in line with market demand.*
- *To ensure that future development within the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre seeks to maximise employment growth for Whitehorse.*
- *To ensure that Box Hill provides accessible, lively and comfortable public spaces that offer diverse opportunities for recreation and social engagement.*
- *Public places*
- *Pedestrian mobility and bicycle access*
- *Public transport*
- *Road traffic management*
- *Car parking*
- *Motor cycle parking*
- *Land use mix and economic and social activities*
- *Built Form*

Clause 22.07 states that use and development of land is to be consistent with the vision for the centre, and the activity and built form precincts in the 2007 Structure Plan. This is supported by specific policy guidance relating to:

The activity and built form precincts and public spaces and access frameworks (as established by the Structure Plan 2007) are included in the policy.

In addition to the Box Hill Structure Plan, other Reference documents listed are:

- Box Hill Transport Interchange Concept Design, March 2002
- Site Development Framework – 545 Station Street, Box Hill, April 2011
- City of Whitehorse Retail Strategy Review, October 2010
- Box Hill Central Activities Area Car Parking Strategy 2013

2.4.3 Clause 22.03 Residential Development

This policy applies to all applications for development within the Neighbourhood Residential, General Residential, Residential Growth, Mixed Use and Priority Development Zones. This policy builds on the MSS objectives in Clause 21.06 – Housing relating to maintaining and enhancing the character of the City's residential areas.

Key policy objectives include:

- *To recognise the potential for change as a result of new social and economic conditions, changing housing preferences and State and local planning policies.*
- *To accommodate the population increases in the municipality in the areas identified as being able to sustain higher density based on environmental and infrastructure considerations.*
- *To recognise that areas of substantial and natural change will make a significant contribution to increases in housing stock.*
- *To facilitate development in areas of substantial change.*

Key strategies for Substantial Change Areas include:

- *Encourage the following forms of housing in Substantial Change areas:*
 - Townhouses.
 - Units.
 - Flats and apartments.
- *Locate new development in the form of flats and apartments in Substantial Change Areas only.*
- *Provide a range of dwelling types, sizes and tenures, including affordable housing, in larger developments.*
- *Ensure buildings interfacing sensitive areas and uses have a scale and massing appropriate to the character and scale of their context.*
- *Create a new, higher density urban character in areas located away from sensitive interfaces.*

Also relevant, Clause 22.03 identifies areas within the activity centre boundary as being located within 'Garden Suburban 11' Neighbourhood Character Area, described as:

A variety of well articulated dwelling styles will sit within compact garden settings. Infill development will be common, however new buildings and additions will be setback at upper levels to minimise dominance in the streetscape. The consistent front setbacks and spacing between dwellings will be retained, with buildings setback or appearing to be setback from at least one side boundary. Low or open style front fences will provide a sense of openness along the streetscape, and allow views into front gardens.

2.4.4 Whitehorse Planning Scheme – Existing Zoning and Overlays

The current land use zone regime within Box Hill includes:

- **Commercial 1 Zone** applies in the core of the centre focussed on the south side of Whitehorse Road and Station Street, and including properties with frontage to the north side of Whitehorse Road.
- **Residential Growth Zone** applies to much of the Activity Centre, operating as a transitional zone between the Commercial 1 Zone and Neighbourhood Residential or General Residential Zones surrounding the activity centre. Schedules 1, 2 and 3 are in operation.
- **Mixed Use Zone** applies to small isolated pockets of land across the centre.
- **Public Use Zone** applies to numerous sites across the centre, including larger institutions, and council or government owned land.
- **Public Park and Recreation Zone** applies to key areas of public open space, including Box Hill Gardens and Kingsley Gardens.
- **Site specific exclusions** apply to a number of individual sites, understood to have been implemented to overcome previous prohibition on accommodation in previous Commercial 2 Zoning of areas of land.

There is only a very approximate alignment between the current planning regime with the 'Activity Precincts' designated in the *2007 Structure Plan*. The Commercial 1 Zone generally covers land designated for Transport and Retail Activity 'Precinct A' and 'Prospect Street - Primary Office' (Precinct B). The Purpose of this zone includes:

- *To create vibrant mixed use commercial centres for retail, office, business, entertainment and community uses.*
- *To provide for residential uses at densities complementary to the role and scale of the commercial centre.*

These purpose statements, and the provisions within the zone, operate universally. For both Precincts A and B, the Commercial 1 Zone provides limited opportunity to respond to the nuances established by the Structure Plan for each precinct.

The Residential Growth Zone applies to significant portions of all other activities precincts, including Hospital and Western TAFE (Precinct D) and Southern and Eastern (Precinct F). The purpose of this zone includes:

- To provide housing at increased densities in buildings up to and including four storey buildings.
- To encourage a diversity of housing types in locations offering good access to services and transport including activity centres and town centres.
- To encourage a scale of development that provides a transition between areas of more intensive use and development and other residential areas.
- To ensure residential development achieves design objectives specified in a schedule to this zone.
- To allow educational, recreational, religious, community and a limited range of other non-residential uses to serve local community needs in appropriate locations.

The *2007 Structure Plan* includes reference to a secondary, residential role for both precincts, but has clear directions for educational, medical and support for related business in Precinct D, and office, retail and mixed use for Precinct F. The current application of the Residential Growth Zone (RGZ) in both precincts demonstrate a mismatch between zoning and the desired land use outcomes set out in the *2007 Structure Plan*.

Recommendations of the *2007 Structure Plan* to rationalise the land use zone regime and apply a more appropriate suite of zones were not fully implemented. This was due to a range of issues including the zoning reforms which resulted in an alternative range of zones available for implementation. For instance, the Residential Growth Zone (RGZ) became a reasonable alternative to the Mixed Use Zone (MUZ), as proposed in the C175 Planning Scheme Amendment.

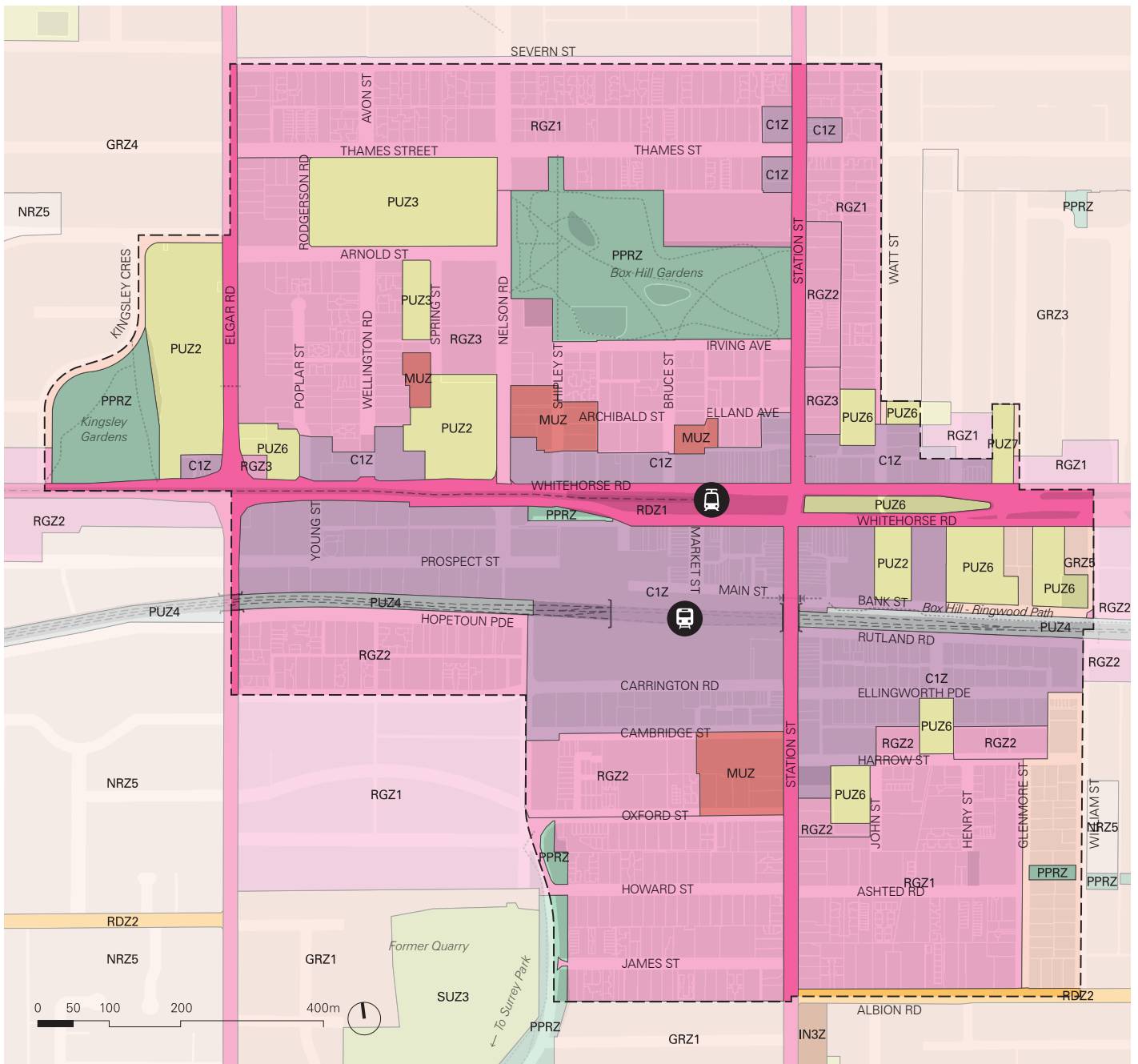


Figure 2.6 Existing zones

Legend

[---] Structure Plan boundary

Zones

- Residential Growth (RGZ)
- General Residential (GRZ)
- Neighbourhood Residential (NRZ)
- Mixed Use (MUZ)
- Commercial 1 (C1Z)
- Industrial 3 (IN3Z)
- Special Use (SUZ)

- Public Use - Education (PUZ2)
- Public Use - Health & Community (PUZ3)
- Public Use - Local Government (PUZ6)
- Public Use - Other (PUZ7)
- Public Use - Transport (PUZ4)
- Public Park & Recreation (PPRZ)
- Road 1 (RDZ1)
- Road 2 (RDZ2)

Overlays

The suite of overlays that currently applies within Box Hill include:

- **Parking Overlay** – applies across the core of the centre, to Commercial and Mixed Use zoned land
- **Heritage Overlay** – applies to individual sites of recognised heritage value across the centre
- **Environmental Audit Overlay** – applies to specific sites known to have formerly been used by a potentially contaminating use
- **Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO9)** – applies to all of the Residential Growth zoned land.
- **Development Plan Overlay (DPO8)** – applies on a site-specific basis at 16-18 Spring Street
- **Design and Development Overlay (DD04)** – affecting the small Neighbourhood Activity Centre, 'Thames & Station Street Shops', in the north east of the Activity Centre.
- **Road Zone Category 1** applying to Whitehorse Road, Station Street, and Elgar Road.
- **Special Building Overlay** applying overland flow paths which affect the southern, and northern, periphery of the centre, as well as part of Box Hill Gardens.

A key aspect for the implementation of the 2007 Structure Plan was the preparation of Design and Development Overlays (DDOs) to incorporate built form controls. This has yet to be successfully implemented.

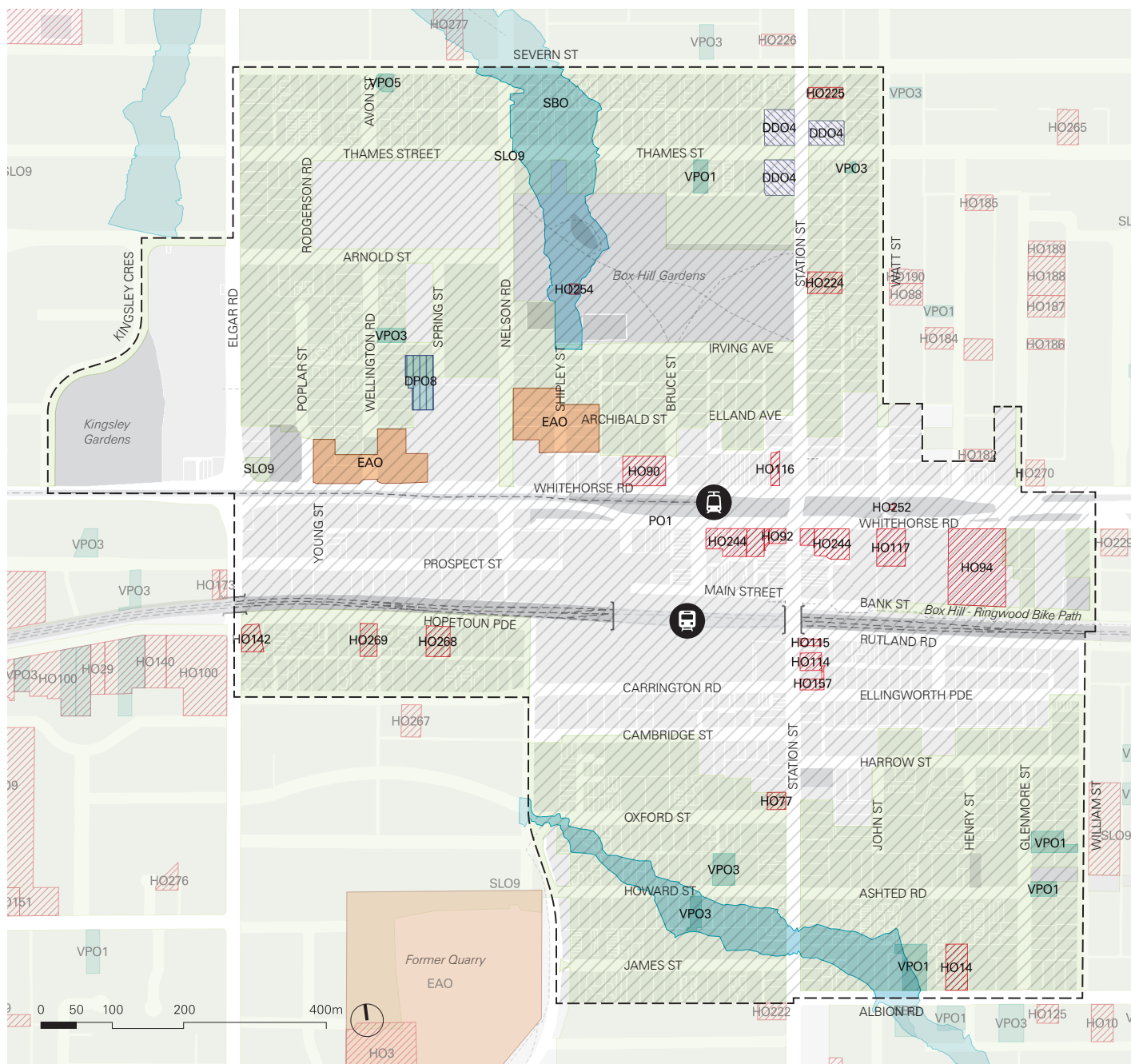


Figure 2.7 Existing overlays

Legend

[---] Structure Plan boundary

Heritage & Built Form overlays

- [Red hatched box] Heritage Overlay (HO)
- [Blue hatched box] Design & Development (DDO)
- [Blue hatched box] Development Plan (DPO)

Environment & Landscape overlays

- [Green box] Significant Landscape (SLO)
- [Blue box] Vegetation Protection (VPO)

Land Management overlays

- [Blue box] Special Building (SBO)

Other overlays

- [Orange box] Environmental Audit (EAO)
- [Grey hatched box] Parking Overlay (PO)

2.4.5 Whitehorse Planning Scheme Amendment C175 – Key issues from the process

In 2016, Council commissioned a project *‘to provide more detailed information and guidance on the preferred future built form outcomes in central Box Hill to improve planning certainty for the community and developers. This work will also form the basis of a Design and Development Overlay for the centre.’* (City of Whitehorse Project Brief ‘Built Form Guidelines for Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre’ May 2016)

This work led to Amendment C175 to the Whitehorse Planning Scheme which proposed to implement the *Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre Built Form Guidelines 2016 (the Box Hill Guidelines)* by Hansen Partnership through the application of a new DDO with accompanying zone and local policy changes. It also proposed to rezone parts of the centre located north of Whitehorse Road from residential to mixed use and commercial zones to allow for a greater level of growth.

The Panel’s analysis of State Planning Policy notes, *‘Box Hill is a Metropolitan Activity Centre, a health and education precinct and has a key transport interchange. The State Planning Policy Framework clearly requires investment and growth to be focused in Box Hill.’* (C175 Panel Report, pp7).

The Panel found that the proposed rezonings were supported by current policy in the Planning Scheme, although did recommend considering the Special Use Zone for the Epworth Private Hospital site.

However, the Panel recommended the other key elements of the proposed amendment be abandoned. Reasons set out in the Panel Report (October 2017) included:

- **Inconsistency and conflict between the two key reference documents** – the *2007 Structure Plan* and the proposed *Box Hill Guidelines* (2016),
- **Imposition of height limits and built form policy that work against metropolitan planning policy** and strategic directions set out for Box Hill in local planning policy

- **Lack of strategic rigour and justification** provided by the Guidelines for the proposed built form controls, and concern with the statutory drafting of the DDO
- **Lack of engagement** with key stakeholders and landowners.

For reference, a copy of the Executive Summary from the C175 Panel Report is attached as an appendix to this report (Appendix 4).

Submissions

Key issues raised in submissions generally related to one of four main categories of concern:

- Process and consultation
- Character and built form/amenity
- Infrastructure – Transport
- Infrastructure – Open space and community

As summarised in the C175 Panel Report, the key issues raised in the submissions of the various parties are as follows:

Process and consultation: The consultation process was inadequate, including that:

- A referendum should have been held
- The Amendment documents were difficult to understand

Character and built form/amenity

- The proposed boundaries of the sub-precincts and sites proposed for rezoning
- The preferred building heights and setbacks proposed in the Guidelines and DDO6
- The effects of the Amendment on amenity, claiming it will destroy, or result in a loss of amenity, integrity and character of the Box Hill
- The effect of the heritage overlay on properties
- Two submitters raised concerns about the approval of current high rise buildings.
- Eight submissions raised concerns about the culture of Box Hill, including racist sentiments.

Infrastructure - Transport

- The inadequacy and overcrowding of public transport infrastructure and its ability to withstand further population increase
- Traffic congestion, the inadequacy of car parking and a perceived inability to cope with an increase in population
- The lack of provision for walking or cycle paths and lanes in the Guidelines

Infrastructure – open space and community

- A perceived inadequacy of open space and a lack of open space or green space provided for in the Guidelines
- The provision of community infrastructure such as schools and sporting facilities

Other key issues raised in the Panel Report included:

A need for engagement with key stakeholders

The Panel found that the development of the DDO did not adequately engage with relevant stakeholders who control land uses that are specifically identified for change, including Vicinity Centres, VicTrack, Box Hill institute and Epworth.

The Panel highlighted the need to ensure that institutions and key authorities are not unreasonably constrained through the planning process where there are clear operation imperatives, and to engage with key stakeholders to determine mutually beneficial outcomes. The Panel also noted the opportunity for a schedule to the DDO to specify that an application is exempt from third party notice and review provisions. (p.47)

The Panel also noted that consultation with land owners of large sites would have resulted in a more informed approach to built form requirements.(p.57)

A need for integrated transport planning and master-planning for the transport interchange

The Panel raised concern that Amendment C175 may limit the redevelopment potential of the Interchange and the relationship between the requirements of the Transport Integration Act and

the Amendment warrant further consideration. The Panel found there is a need to undertake a master planning exercise for the Interchange, with input from key stakeholders including Vicinity Centres and Victrack as identified in the *2007 Structure Plan*. (p.7)

The Panel agreed with Vicinity Centres that a comprehensive assessment and an integrated development proposal was warranted in this area. As a result, the Panel considered that the area should be removed from the DDO, subject to a separate master planning approach. This would enable Vicinity Centres to “work with a range of stakeholders, including Council” towards a comprehensive proposal for the area and the preparation of an appropriate suite of planning tools to facilitate and guide the development of this proposal (p.20-21).

A need for built form modelling and analysis to underpin height controls

The Panel concluded that the development of a DDO has significant strategic support, and is specifically recommended by the Structure Plan, and that there is strategic support for application of the DDO with discretionary controls. The Panel also acknowledged the possibility that a more detailed analysis of the activity centre could result in a potential case for mandatory controls across all or part of the centre, subject to:

- Appropriate strategic justification. (p.10)
- Rigorous built form testing
- Establishment of a clear vision to underpin an Urban Design Framework

The Panel also noted that the absence of height controls in Precinct F was a deliberate policy position reflecting the Structure Plan ambition to encourage significant high density development. (p.17) Any proposal to introduce height limits in this precinct needs to ensure it does not provide contradictory policy directions or introduce inconsistencies with broader strategic planning objectives for intensification in major activity centres, the vision for Box Hill, and directions set in the updated structure plan. Height limits also need to be underpinned by a coherent rationale.

The Panel also recommended further work was required to justify any street wall and setback controls. It suggested that a detailed investigation of amenity impacts resulting from existing development in the activity centre should be completed to inform future built form controls. It also suggested that a more detailed streetscape analysis is required to inform controls for street wall heights and setbacks, taking into account recently constructed and approved development, topography, street trees and so on. (p.64-65)

Potential role for density controls

Amendment C175 proposed to include plot ratio controls for large sites. The Panel noted that some form of plot ratio approach may be appropriate for the development of land within the activity centre, but that the Amendment was not supported by any rationale for such a development control or explanation of how it could work in Box Hill.

The Panel's recommendation was that if a plot ratio approach is to be pursued by Council, then it needs significantly more work to justify and explain any plot ratio approach to managing development in the activity centre. (p.57).

Although not explicitly stated by the Panel, the inclusion of a plot ratio approach may provide a foundation to build in opportunity for development uplift as an incentive for delivery of public benefits. Any such approach would need to be unambiguous and strategically justified.

Delivery of public infrastructure

The scope of Amendment C175 focussed on development and implementation of new built form guidelines. The Panel cautioned against the inclusion of mechanisms which could result in the public acquisition of land without appropriate compensation. (p.71). This recommendation was made in the context of requiring provision of land for new streets/laneway access.

The Panel did not provide recommendations regarding the need for infrastructure contributions. However, the updated structure plan and urban design framework should ultimately be supported by a public and private investment plan, which could include an infrastructure contributions plan as a key component.

Special Use Rezoning

The Panel noted the various recommendations for rezonings in the 2007 Structure Plan including use of:

- Public Use Zone for various institutional sites (noting this has now been applied)
- Priority Development Zone for part of Hospital and Western TAFE Precinct D (area bounded by Whitehorse Road, Nelson Road, Arnold Street and Elgar Road)

Amendment C175 proposed to use the Mixed Use Zone for much of Precinct D, as well as Box Hill Gardens Precinct E.

The Epworth submitted that a Special Use Zone would be more appropriate than the MUZ, having regard to the health and education uses encouraged by *Plan Melbourne* and the Structure Plan. The Panel found that the Mixed Use Zoning could be supported on the basis that the Special Use Zone had not been exhibited. However it considered that Council should give future consideration to rezoning the Epworth site to a Special Use Zone.

Council's Response (following consideration of the Panels recommendations)

While Council acknowledged the Panel's conclusion, it remained 'concerned about the ability of the area to balance the need for investment and growth whilst creating a liveable, vibrant and attractive State significant metropolitan centre, and the need to provide more detailed information and guidance on preferred future built form outcomes in central Box Hill.' (Whitehorse City Council Ordinary Council Minutes 25 June 2018, pg.9)

Council considered the Panel Report and its recommendations at the meeting on 25 June 2018. At this meeting, Council resolved to;

- Abandon Amendment C175 and notify the Minister for Planning of Council's decision.
- Note the program of future work for the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre included in the 2018/19 budget process.
- Continue advocating to the State Government about upgrading the Box Hill Transit Interchange as a result of the ongoing designation of Box Hill as a Metropolitan Activity Centre and furthermore the Amendment C175 Panel Report which discusses the importance of the interchange.
- Advise all submitters of this resolution in relation to the Panel Report for Amendment C175.

This project seeks to assist Council in progressing planning for Box Hill, and specifically to address the issues raised by the Panel Report.



2.5

Project Brief

Review of Strategic Direction for Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre

2.5.1 What we have been asked to do

In late 2018 Council issued the brief for the current project. The project brief was to undertake “a review of the vision and existing strategic direction for Box Hill and provide future guidance for the Metropolitan Activity Centre”, including the preparation of a vision for the future of Box Hill, reviewing and updating the *2007 Structure Plan* and preparing an urban design framework to support the structure plan.

The brief essentially seeks to establish the future urban form and develop controls to guide development towards this outcome. The revised vision for the activity centre provides the guidance for preferred outcomes delivered through the planning controls.

The project brief assumes that:

- Apart from the revised vision, the structure plan will be largely retained in its existing form with only limited updates.
- Public transport remains largely in its current form. An integrated transport strategy will be undertaken separately, concurrent with this project.
- Masterplanning for the transport interchange will be undertaken at a later date, involving direct and more detailed engagement with Vicinity and VicTrack as primary land owners.
- The activity centre boundary will remain as defined in the *2007 Structure Plan*.
- Contribution schemes to support community infrastructure will be considered at a later point.

Note that questions on all of these topics are likely to be raised at a future planning panel, consistent with the submissions made during the C175 panel hearing.

2.5.2 Gaps that need further investigation

The evidence set out in this report shows Box Hill is at a tipping point. Substantial change has already occurred but future projections and the planning applications currently under consideration begin to indicate that much more substantial change is likely in the future. The magnitude of change has significant implications for the geographic extent of the activity centre, models of public transport provision, location and scale of community infrastructure, public open space provision and mechanisms for shared funding of community needs.

Planning Practice Note 58: Structure Planning for Activity Centres (PPN58) sets out a range of considerations that should be addressed through a full structure planning process, including the need to define the activity centre boundary in relation to established criteria.

In addition, the growing future community has implications for changing infrastructure needs. Future population growth will increase the need for schools, childcare and other lifelong learning opportunities. Comparable centres experiencing significant change such as Footscray and Glen Waverley have demonstrated that growth in community infrastructure needs to be in accessible locations in order to support sustainable transport mode share targets.

These gaps will need further technical investigation beyond the scope of this current report.

2.6 Consultation Findings

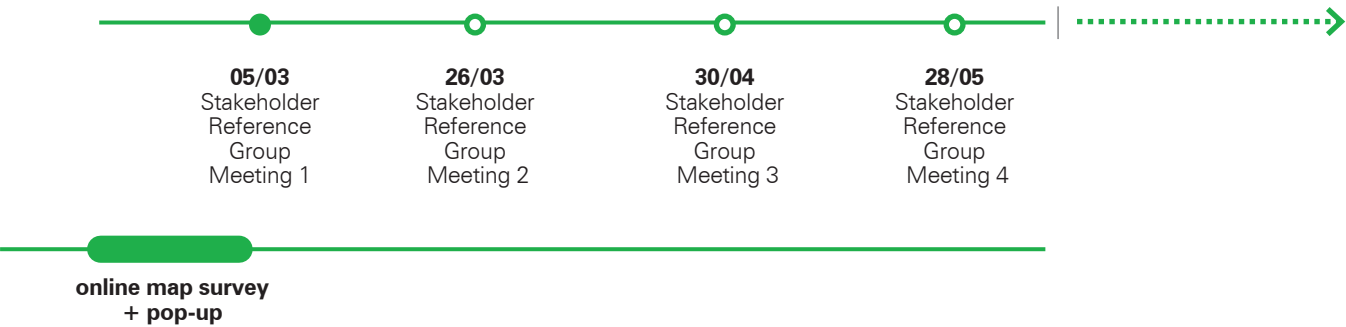
2.6.1 Consultation strategy

In reviewing the strategic directions for Box Hill, we have engaged with stakeholders and the wider community to fill the gaps in understanding of the key issues and concerns for future development. Engagement is a critical part of the project given the issues cited by the Panel Report in relation to the lack of engagement preceding Amendment C175. The Panel’s conclusions on the matter of stakeholder engagement noted that ‘the process of developing the DDO did not engage with relevant stakeholders who control land uses that are specifically identified in metropolitan policy for change...’ This is addressed as a priority within our approach. The current process has sought to extend on the existing submissions received by Council for the C175 amendment.

The stakeholder engagement and consultation strategy is composed of three main components:

- Direct engagement with key agencies and landowners for strategic development sites in the form of one-on-one or small group meetings;
- Broad public consultation using an online map survey and a pop-up event within Box Hill; and
- Establishing a Stakeholder Reference Group composed of key representatives from community, institutions, land owners and agencies

Each of these components has been started over the January-February period of the first phase of the project. The consultation process will continue through the remainder of the project. The preliminary findings to date are detailed in sections 2.6.4 - 2.6.6 of this report.



2.6.2 Consultation Themes

All consultation to date (in meetings and through surveys) has been structured using the same broad themes relevant to the *2007 Structure Plan*. This was conceived specifically to broaden the conversation beyond a focus on built form outcomes towards a wider range of potential opportunities for the plan to respond to. We asked participants to direct their feedback towards the following broad areas of interest.



Places and Spaces for People: this theme relates to public and community facilities, both indoors and outside. The questions covered the needs of the community as a whole as well as the more specialised needs of smaller community sectors such as the elderly, children and families. This theme also introduced cultural diversity as a topic for feedback.



Living in Box Hill: this theme relates to providing homes for a growing and changing community. The need to house a significantly larger future population was one consideration, as were the specific needs of families, students and an aging community. We made specific reference to different types of housing including higher-density apartments as well as lower height developments.



Working and learning in Box Hill: our questions highlighted the important role of the centre in providing employment opportunities and we raised the significant future employment growth as an important factor to consider. The questions within this theme introduced the important role of both small and large enterprises as well as health and education institutions as employment generators.



Shopping and visiting Box Hill: this theme provided a context for discussions about the people who visit Box Hill, their reasons for visiting and what attracts people to stay. This included visiting Box Hill for shopping, recreation, entertainment, for business or to visit friends.



Getting around Box Hill: this very broad category of questions concerned the multiple ways people get to, from and around Box Hill, including by walking, bicycle, public transport or private vehicles. Box Hill's major role as a transport interchange was a focus but also the challenges of managing traffic congestion and parking were introduced as topics to consider.



Buildings, character, and image: this area of discussion concerned questions of what Box Hill looks and feels like – its 'character', its 'image and identity' and what makes it a distinctive and special place for the whole community. The question of landmarks and key streetscapes was introduced considering both built form and the public realm.

2.6.3 Community Engagement Approach

The main component of the broader community engagement was an online map survey hosted on Whitehorse City Council's consultation website. The aim of this online interface was to rapidly engage with a potentially broad (though self-selected) portion of the community both living within and visiting Box Hill for work or recreation. The approach meant that the process was open to people who were not physically in Box Hill during the specific consultation period.

The structure of the interface allowed for both simple and deeper participation and feedback. Initially participants were invited to drop a pin on a map sorted by the consultation themes, and provide an open written response to two questions: "Why did you choose this location?" and "How would you like this place to look or feel in the future?" Participants were also asked to rate the place on a scale from "very bad" to "very good". Once pin feedback was given participants were invited to provide more detailed feedback in response to survey questions related to the theme of interest.

A pop-up event formed an extension of the online survey. Members of the project team plus council officers participated in a three-hour event within the Box Hill mall that was primarily intended to raise awareness of the survey but also secondarily intended to gain additional feedback from members of the community that might not otherwise have access to the website. Community members were invited to give feedback on a hard-copy survey or to go to the website to give their ideas.

The result of the combined online and pop-up was as follows:

- 70+ conversations at the pop-up event
- 771 unique visitors to the online map
- 122 pins provided by 54 authors
- 63 votes on the pin comments provided by 13 voters
- 31 people provided answers to the more detailed survey questions
- 8 survey responses were provided a written hard copy submissions
- Additional comments provided via Facebook

The online interface for the map and survey allowed the collection of basic demographic details of the participants. Of the 59 separate participants in the map interface (providing either pins, votes or comments), 29 were female (49%), 18 were male (31%) and 12 unknown (20%). Of the 31 participants in the detailed survey, 20 were female (65%) and 11 were male (35%).

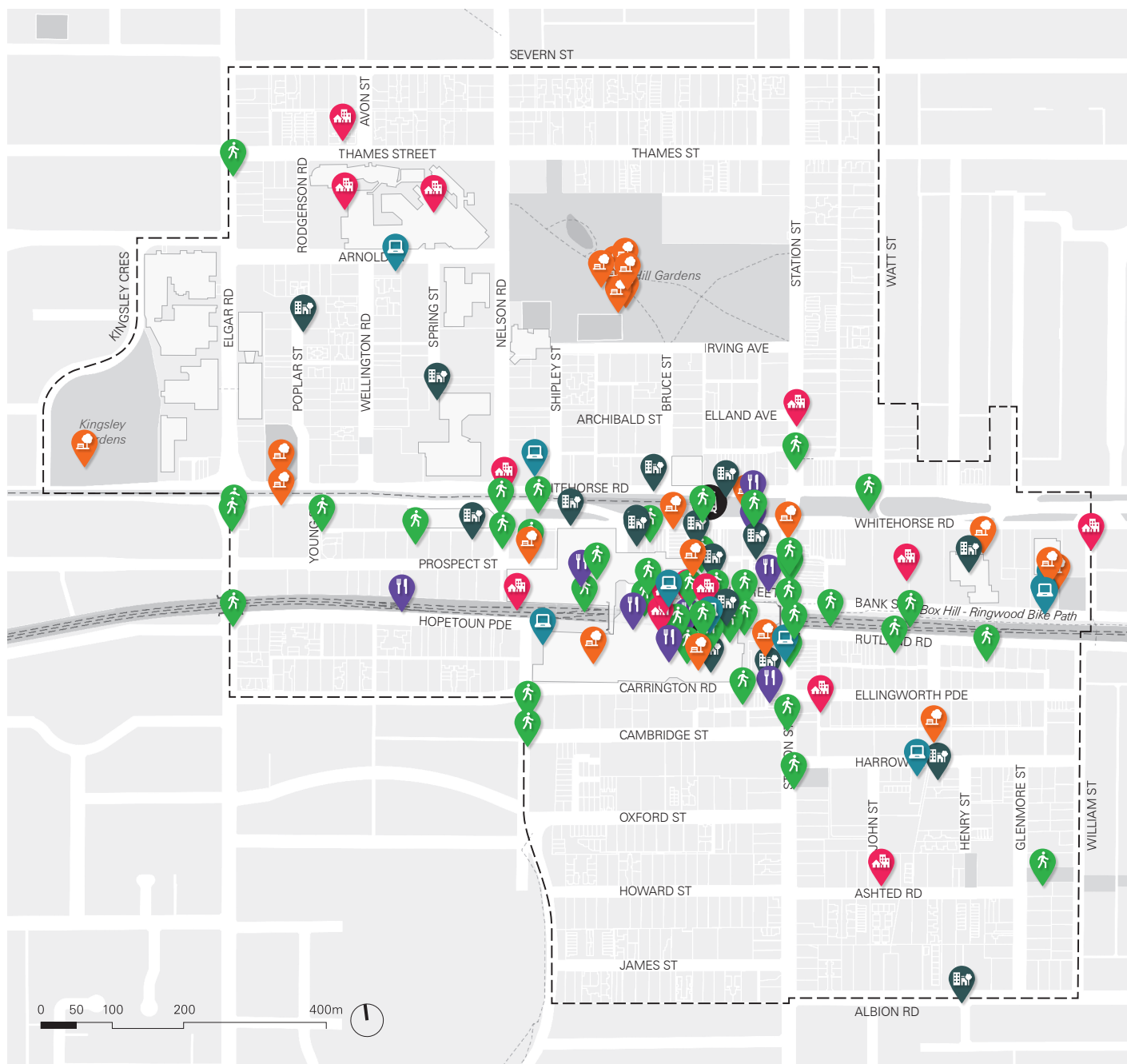


Figure 2.8 Survey results by theme

Legend

[] Structure Plan boundary

Pin themes

- Places and Spaces for People
- Living in Box Hill
- Working and Learning in Box Hill
- Shopping and Visiting Box Hill
- Getting around Box Hill
- Buildings, character and image

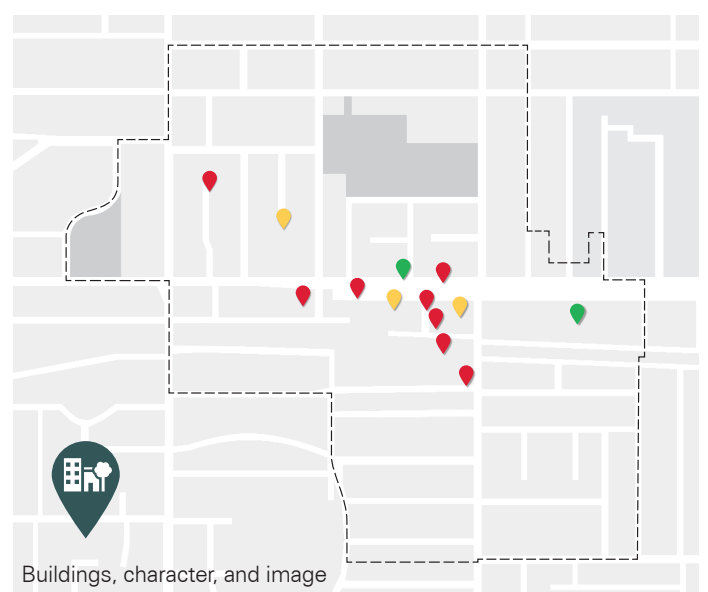
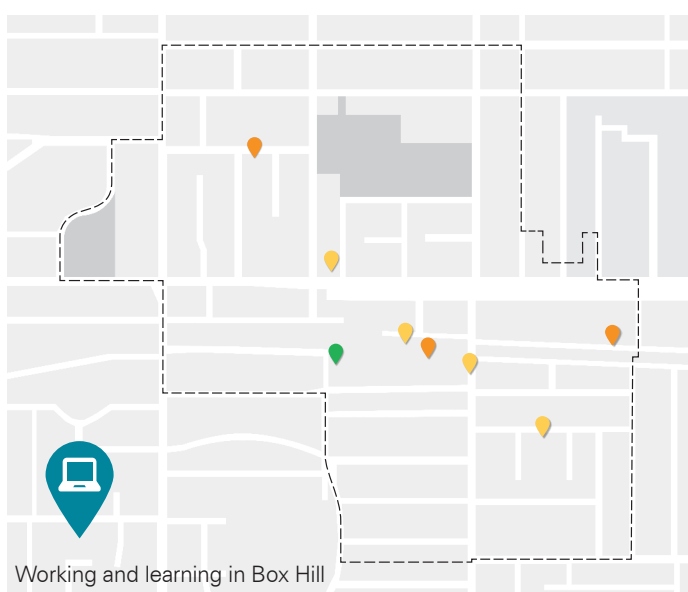
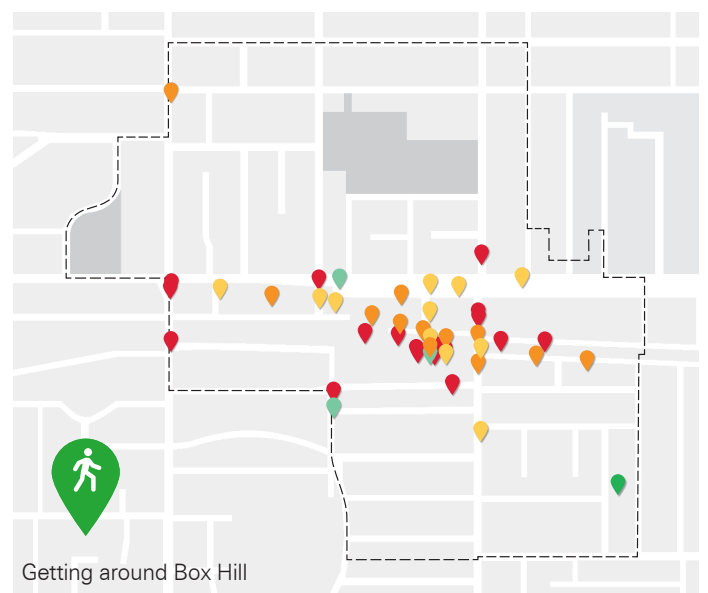
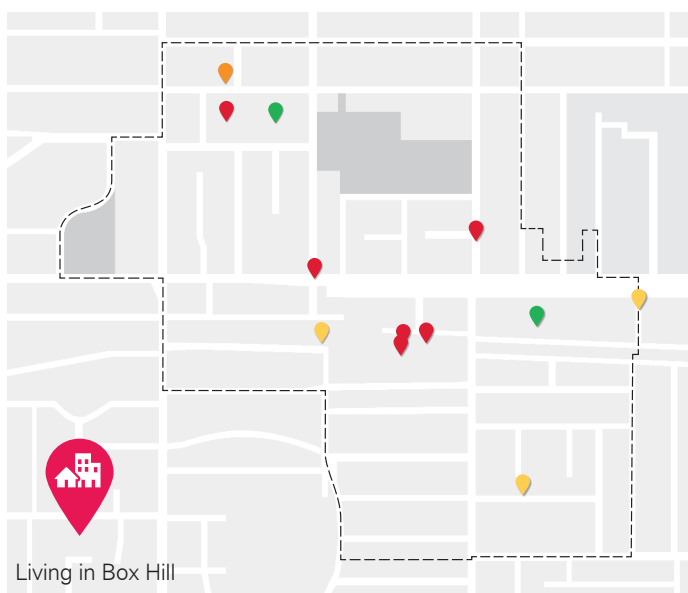
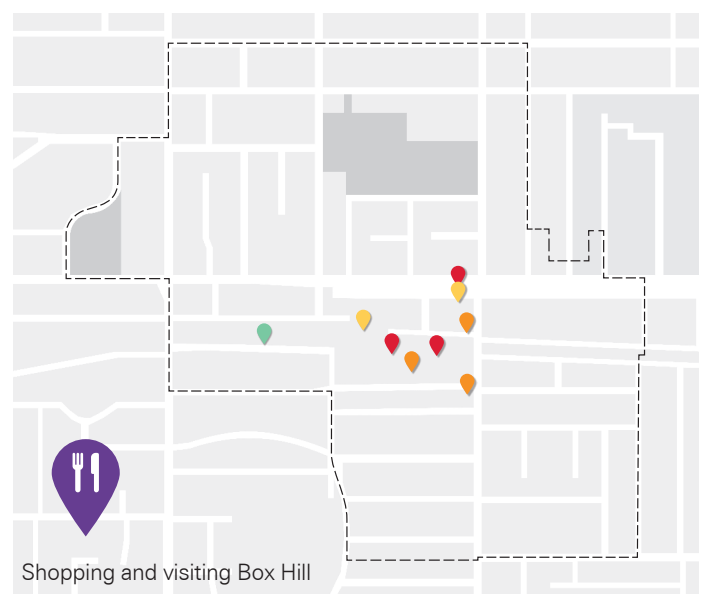
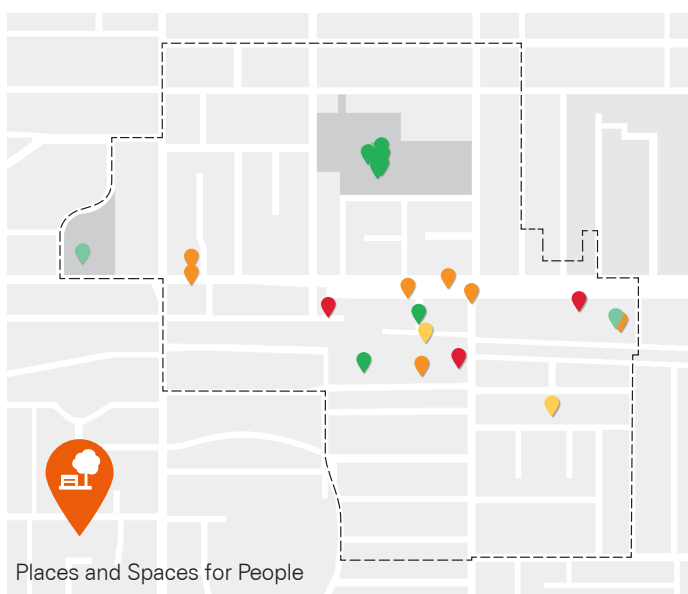


Figure 2.9 Survey results by ranking for each theme



2.6.4 Community Perspectives

A preliminary review of the responses to the map and the survey has provided a series of key perspectives to address through the structure plan process.

The importance of quality places

The places that received the most positive responses were predominately examples of public and community infrastructure. Box Hill Gardens, Kingsley Gardens, Box Hill Hospital, the library and the town hall were all identified as valued elements of Box Hill's identity. In the future these valued locations should look and feel similar to how they are now – the key message was that these important places should be protected. More access to leafy green places and more community space was described as important. Better connections between the bus and other transport interchanges was nominated as important, as was more nightlife and opportunities for more restaurants, shops and spaces for events.

Dissatisfaction with degraded facilities

In general terms there were many more places that received negative responses than positive. The poor quality of the transport interchange was repeatedly raised as a major issue, using words like old, dirty, shabby, narrow, crowded and poorly connected to describe it. The only positive aspect of the transport interchange was its functional value as a means to access multiple public transport options. Improved interconnectivity for pedestrians and mobility impaired patrons between buses, trams and trains was an obvious and repeated preferred future change, but so was the importance of clean and bright spaces that were safe and inviting and include greenery.

The interchange was not the only location described using these similarly negative terms. Many public areas (both in the public realm and the quality of private buildings) particularly in the core of the centre were also described as tired or dirty. The underpass across Station Street was repeatedly noted by respondents as a poor space for pedestrians and unsuitable for cyclists. Poor lighting in public spaces was also repeatedly raised as an important perceived safety issue.

Increasing congestion

Traffic congestion and parking issues was another dominant characteristic of many negative responses. Various respondents referred to the difficulty in driving through the centre and finding parking at the core. Equally, traffic was seen as a key barrier to walking around the centre, alongside inconsistent footpath quality and accessibility. The very poor quality of bicycle infrastructure was noted in multiple locations. Overall, however, the preferred future response to congestion and accessibility was surprisingly diverse. While some saw the importance of more parking, others suggested removing car parking and even the pedestrianisation of parts of the core to make it easier to get around. Improved north-south pedestrian connections across Whitehorse Road and across the rail line was mentioned repeatedly. Completion of major cycle routes was raised by more than one respondent.

Built form and character

Multiple respondents raised the issue of development scale. Many responses focussed on poor quality high rise development, loss of trees and the wind tunnel effect created by taller buildings. Interestingly, some responses that were highly critical of high rise apartments still nominated heights of up to five or six storeys as “lower rise” development that might be appropriate for the centre. There were multiple references to increasing the amount of greenery and a reduction in building bulk as a potential improvement. Multiple responses included references to the problem of uncoordinated development – neighbourhoods were described as collections of individual buildings with no unified vision. Multiple responses referred to the importance of leafy streets and good public spaces as a way to make the neighbourhoods feel like places.

Cultural diversity

A significant number of respondents pointed to tensions from a perceived dominance by two major cultural groups rather than the diversity more representative of broader Melbourne. Very few responses described Box Hill as a multicultural place at the moment, even though festivals and public places such as the fresh food market and Carrington Road were noted as positive features of the area. Multiple responses suggested that Box Hill would benefit from greater cultural diversity. Specifically there was a desire for a greater range of cultures to be represented in the range of shops and restaurants in Box Hill.

2.6.5 Stakeholder Perspectives

A Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) has been established in order to more deeply engage with key stakeholders across the local community, major institutions, business groups, land owners, developers, and key government agencies. This group has met once but will continue to meet across the whole planning review process in order to ensure they are informed, involved, updated, tested and listened to and that their engagement is genuine and positive.

The first meeting of the Stakeholder Reference Group focussed on the overall vision for the centre. This included the broader aspects that make Box Hill distinctive and the future priorities for individual neighbourhoods and parts of the activity centre. Some of the key messages raised by participants included:

- The distinctive role of the transport hub, the hospital and Box Hill Institute amongst other activity anchors of Box Hill need to be explicitly referenced in the future vision for the activity centre.
- Box Hill's special role in providing diversified employment opportunities needs to be protected and enhanced. This will require explicit support for health and education institutions but also sensitive consideration of the challenges of incentivising office and startup spaces. There is a genuine risk of the erosion of employment opportunities over time if they are not better supported.
- The layers of Box Hill's history – including both buildings and major open spaces – needs to be celebrated as an important aspect of its character.
- Multicultural diversity is a core part of Box Hill's character, however Box Hill is maybe not as diverse as originally perceived. The centre currently effectively serves two dominant monocultures (predominantly Caucasian and predominantly Asian) and is not necessarily welcoming for all cultures. Box Hill needs to be welcoming for all cultures.

- The centre needs to be more easily accessible, both for pedestrians inside the centre and also for areas surrounding the centre. Improving access to nearby major open spaces will improve the amenity for residents within the centre. Improving access to nearby activities such as Deakin University will help integrate Box Hill within its region.
- Need for a radical recalibration of the town centre including significant growth in retail and entertainment as well as integrated community spaces, indoor and out.
- An appetite for provision of high quality workplaces within Box Hill.

The specific future plans (where these are known) for the key institutions and strategic sites in the centre (Council, Box Hill Institute, Box Hill Hospital and Vicinity Centres) will be discussed further in Section 3.4 of this report.

For reference, a copy of the presentation slides from the first Stakeholder Reference Group workshop is located in the Appendix to this report (Appendix 2).



Figure 2.10 Excerpt from presentation to Stakeholder Reference Group meeting

2.6.6 Councillor and Council Officer Workshops

Alongside workshops with stakeholders and engagement with the wider community, the project team has engaged in workshop discussions with Councillors and council officers on the future vision for Box Hill and its multiple neighbourhoods. Some early points of feedback include the following:

- The existing vision provides a positive message, but the words used are very broad and does not capture the distinctive qualities or strengths of Box Hill, see Figure 2.10.
- Ensuring that Box Hill remains open and welcoming is a core quality that needs to be emphasised. This refers both to the amenity and activation within the central area as well as the quality of the pedestrian and cycle links to the surrounding areas outside of the activity centre boundaries.
- There are distinctive strengths in relation to health and education that need to be articulated within the vision. Equally, the vision should relate to future employment trends and emerging opportunities for employment growth and change. The future vision needs to be agile enough to respond to change and have sufficient resilience to provide guidance through multiple cycles of change.
- Box Hill should be a place for people – the quality of the public realm and community infrastructure is critically important to ensure that the community feels welcome and included throughout the centre.
- Box Hill is made up of a lot of communities and a lot of parts. The vision needs to talk about multiple generations and their different relationships with the centre. It needs to be conceived of as a series of connected villages that come together to function as a city centre.

We can conclude that a redrafting of the vision is necessary. This will be discussed within the subsequent stages of the project.

