

Consultation summary report

Housing Discussion Paper



About this report

This report summarises the findings from the engagement process that will inform the development of Banyule's new Housing Strategy and Neighbourhood Character Strategy. It provides an overview of the engagement activities conducted from July to October 2023 by community engagement consultants, i.e. community and Banyule City Council, key findings from all activities, and detailed findings of the activities other than the surveys. Detailed findings of the community survey and youth survey are provided as attachments.

Introduction

Project background

As a starting point for the engagement process, Council developed a Housing Discussion Paper to facilitate community participation in the review of the Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategies. This Discussion Paper builds on the insights gathered through the development of and feedback on the 2021 Preliminary Discussion Paper. Its purpose is to identify the social, economic, and geographic factors that shape residential development in Banyule. It also explores potential directions for our residential strategies. Our aim is to equip our community and stakeholders with the information they need to provide informed input and feedback on the housing issues facing Banyule. While we are developing the Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategies, we have put in place an Interim Social and Affordable Housing Policy to guide our immediate actions while we work towards a comprehensive long-term policy. Although the focus of this engagement is on broader housing issues and neighbourhood character, the insights we gain will also contribute to our actions on social and affordable housing.

The Discussion Paper is structured around three strategic pillars, each addressing a key area of concern identified by our community. Together, they will guide the location and type of new housing through the Banyule Planning Scheme.

Pillar 1: Driving Housing for All

We know from our research and community feedback that there is a lack of housing choices in Banyule and that housing affordability is a major concern. Data from the 2021 Census shows that Banyule has very few options for moderate-income earners to buy or rent, and low-income earners have even fewer opportunities. This includes essential workers, many of whom can't afford to live close to work. By focusing on driving housing for all, the actions under this pillar aim to expand the range of housing being built and address the 'missing middle' of medium-density housing to meet the community's needs.

Pillar 2: Elevating Good Design

It is also clear from community feedback and our own assessments that many new homes are not designed to an appropriate standard. We are doing well in some areas of good design, including environmental and landscaping requirements, but housing in Banyule could be improved with more guidance on designing facades, selecting materials and internal layouts. By elevating good design, the actions in this pillar aim to ensure new homes are liveable, sustainable and cater to the needs of a diverse community.

Pillar 3: Valuing Preferred Neighbourhood Character

Neighbourhood character has long been a priority for the Banyule community and the actions in this pillar will ensure that valuing neighbourhood character remains central to the discussion about housing new housing. While neighbourhood character means different things to different people, some attributes like vegetation and access to open space are highly valued.

Engagement purpose and scope

The engagement aimed to seek feedback from the community on the objectives presented in the Housing Discussion Paper and obtain input on some options to address key housing challenges facing Banyule.

The objectives of the engagement, as outlined in the Paper, were to:

- Seek feedback on the proposed matters to include in a Housing Strategy and Neighbourhood Character Strategy.
- To build knowledge amongst key stakeholders and community members of changing demographics and factors that impact housing in Banyule and the rationale to inform the Housing Strategy, Neighbourhood Character Strategy and Interim Social and Affordable Housing Strategy.
- Strengthen community members' awareness of the local government's scope to address housing, neighbourhood character, and social and affordable housing.
- Reflect that the Housing Discussion Paper has been developed off the back of previous engagement processes.
- Outline considerations and parameters that have informed the documents.

Engagement activities and participation

Survey

An online survey was distributed through Council's Shaping Banyule page from July 17 to September 14, 2023. 146 people provided responses to the survey.

The survey responses are considered in the Housing Discussion Paper Survey and Submissions Analysis prepared by Council, see Attachment 1.

Pop-ups

Three pop-ups were held to promote the project and engagement activities, provide an opportunity for the community to ask questions and provide general feedback about housing matters. Throughout the process, an estimated 115 people were engaged in conversation through the pop-ups at three locations across Banyule. Many more people accepted a promotional postcard about the project as they were walking by the pop-ups.

- Bell St Mall, Heidelberg West, 24 July 2023, 10am - 12pm
 - About 40 people were engaged
- Greensborough Plaza, Greensborough, 31 July 2023, 9am - 12pm
 - About 15 people were engaged
- Macleod Market, Macleod
 - About 60 people were engaged 19 August 2023, 9am-12pm

Advisory committee briefings

Council officers attended 7 Banyule Advisory Committee briefings to provide a short overview of the discussion paper and capture feedback. Council officers attended briefings for the following advisory committees:

- Inclusive Banyule Advisory Committee, 2 August 2023, 9-10 am
- LGBTIQ+ Advisory Committee, 10 August 2023, 6-6:30 pm
- Multicultural Advisory Committee, 16 August 2023, 6-6:30 pm
- Age-friendly Advisory Committee, 17 August 2023, 11-11:30 am
- Disability and Inclusion Advisory Committee, 23 August 2023, 6-6:30 pm
- Reconciliation Action Plan Advisory Committee, 13 September, 6-6:15pm
- Environment and Climate Action Advisory Committee, 14 September, 7-7:30 pm

Walking tours

Four walking tours were held across Banyule. The aim of the walking tours was to explore areas of differing neighbourhood character and discuss examples of what was working and what could be improved, with a focus on medium-density housing. Community views were sought on the key elements that contribute to neighbourhood character and good design. The tours were also used as an opportunity to inform the community about the issues explored in the Discussion Paper.

In total, 44 people participated in the walking tours, which were held in:

- Macleod, 29 July, 2023 10am - 11am.
 - 20 people participated
- Montmorency, 29 July 2023, 12 pm - 1pm.
 - 4 people participated
- Ivanhoe, 5 August 2023, 10am - 11am.

- 13 people participated
- Heidelberg, 5 August 2023, 12pm - 1pm.
 - 7 people participated.

Community workshops

Two community workshops were held to test the opportunities raised in the Housing Discussion Paper and explore a focus question for each pillar. In Workshop #1, the small group preferred to talk more generally about the opportunities and challenges of the Housing Discussion Paper so the focus questions were not used.

In total, 27 people participated in the workshops.

- Workshop #1, Council offices, Greensborough, 2 August 2023, 6pm to 8pm
 - 4 participants
- Workshop #2, Ivanhoe Library, 8 August 2023, 6pm to 8pm.
 - 23 participants

Youth survey

In response to a lack of participation by people aged 30 and under, a Youth Survey was prepared and promoted to Council's youth networks. The survey was open for three weeks, between 28 August to 15 September. It consisted of 10 questions targeted at understanding the issues and opportunities faced by young people in Banyule. 15 responses were received. The Youth Survey responses are considered in the Housing Discussion Paper Survey and Submissions Analysis prepared by Council, see Attachment 1.

Submissions

6 people submitted free form submissions via email or mail. A summary of each submission is provided in the detailed findings. To ensure the views of co-housing residents were captured, i.e. also undertook outreach to co-housing residents of Murundaka Cohousing.

Promotion

The promotion of the community consultation was supported by advertising in the Banyule Banner newspaper and a social media campaign run by Council.

A Banyule Banner article was included in the July/August edition. The article encouraged the community to engage with the project through the project page on Shaping Banyule website.

Posts were shared on Council Facebook and Instagram at various points throughout the consultation period to promote the project and upcoming activities.

In addition to posts on Council's accounts, two geo-targeted adverts were run on Facebook, which provided a link to the projects page on Shaping Banyule, as detailed below.

- Campaign #1 ran 31 July to 11 August 2023. It reached 17,232 people and brought 473 people to the Shaping Banyule pages.
- Campaign #2 ran 15 to 22 August. It reached 10,408 people and resulted in 253 people visiting the Shaping Banyule page. Campaign #2 targeted specific groups which the project had received low levels of communication, particularly renters, key workers, students and investors.

Both campaigns generated high levels of interest based on Facebook metrics.

Overall key findings

Pillar 1: Driving Housing for all

Support diverse housing options: There was clear support for increasing housing near essential services and transport to meet the evolving needs of Banyule's diverse and growing population. The number of single-bedroom apartments has raised concerns, with participants noting a gap in suitable housing options for families.

Divided views on high-density housing: Participants were split regarding high-density housing development in areas like Heidelberg, Greensborough, and Ivanhoe, showing contrasting preferences for urban development and neighbourhood character preservation.

Affordable housing is a concern: Strong support exists for affordable housing targets in new developments, although there is disagreement about using incentives and Council land for these projects. Views on the Council's role in affordable housing vary, with some assigning it to higher government levels.

Council's role in the provision of affordable housing: Views on Council's role in the provision of affordable housing were varied. Some see it as a State or Federal government responsibility. Others hope to see Council play a greater role as a facilitator between developers, the community and the State, or educating on and regulating design standards.

Balancing housing and heritage: Many participants were concerned with the balancing of housing needs with preserving Banyule's historical and aesthetic significance.

Support for innovative housing models: Participants showed support for co-housing and 'aging in place' initiatives and hoped to see more involvement from Council in these spaces.

Pillar 2: Elevating good design

Support for accessible and sustainable design: There was support for the objectives of the discussion paper that accessible for all ages and abilities, promotes sustainable living, and meets the varying needs of the community while aligning with sustainability and neighbourhood character.

High and medium-density housing: Participants were concerned about the impacts of high and medium-density housing on vegetation, biodiversity, and visual amenity.

Support for quality design measures: Participants strongly supported initiatives like the Design Excellence Program, encouraging better design outcomes and call for more comprehensive guidance on achieving good design, particularly in medium and high-density developments.

Environmental sustainability and biodiversity: There was strong push for environmentally sustainable design principles, including vegetation retention, ensuring canopy cover and the use of native plants.

Design preferences: Good articulation and differing depths of setbacks, front porches or verandas were seen as contributing to an active frontage and positive neighbourhood character.

Pillar 3: Valuing preferred neighbourhood character

Enhancing local identity: Participants strongly favoured new residential buildings that reinforce local identity and create a sense of place, aligning with the existing character of neighbourhoods.

The pace of change and development: There were concerns about the pace of change and its potential negative impacts on the community. Emphasis is placed on the need for well-managed, high-quality development that enhances neighbourhoods while preserving green spaces.

Stronger protection of neighbourhood character: There was a desire for more definitive policies to protect neighbourhood character. This came through particularly strongly in community workshops.

Vegetation and canopy cover: Feedback from both the walking tours and workshops highlight the importance of trees, greenery, and native vegetation in defining neighbourhood character. There's a strong interest in preserving canopy cover and biodiversity.

Summary of findings by activity

Survey

Driving Housing for All

- Survey results indicate broad support for all the 'Driving Housing for All' objectives.
 - Increase housing near services and transport to meet the housing needs of a more diverse and growing community (66%)
 - Help individuals, key workers, and families of all income levels to access high-quality housing options (67%)
 - Expand the range of housing types and tenures in our communities (55%)
- There was support for locating medium-density housing within walking distance to public transport, shops and community services (63%)
- There was a mixed reaction to the question of whether Heidelberg, Greensborough and Ivanhoe are still the best locations to encourage high-density housing (48% agree, 46% disagree) and a mixed reaction to identifying new locations for high-density housing (50% agree, 45% disagree)
- There was a significant amount of disagreement with statements relating to supporting and encouraging affordable housing projects through incentives (58%) and unlocking underutilised Council land for affordable housing development (51%)
- There was support for making social and affordable housing mandatory in new major residential developments (56% agree).

Elevating Good Design

- There was strong support all of the three 'Elevating Good Design' objectives:
 - Ensure the accessibility and usability of housing for people of all ages and abilities (82%)
 - Promote functional and sustainable living (89%)
 - Promote good design that meets the varying needs of the community while also meeting other objectives like sustainability and neighbourhood character (82%)
- A little more than half of respondents (52%) disagreed with the objective that 'High and medium density buildings promote cohesive, sustainable and liveable communities'.
- There was strong support for the following ideas to elevate good design:
 - A Design Excellence Program which encourages and celebrates better design outcomes in our residential areas (78%)
 - More guidance on how to achieve good design outcomes for residential development, especially for medium and high-density developments (79%)
- When asked for suggestions to support good design, suggestions included providing expert architectural and urban design advice and guidance for applicants and Council planners. Some respondents called for design excellence to be mandatory and tighter regulation.
- There was strong support (91%) for Council to 'continue to seek ways to support sustainability and biodiversity through environmentally sustainable design principles, vegetation retention and planting native plants'.

Valuing Preferred Neighbourhood Character

- There was a high level of support for the two Preferred Neighbourhood Character objectives:
 - New residential buildings support local identity and a sense of place (75%)
 - Ensure new residential buildings meet preferred character requirements (83%)
- While some residents accept change as inevitable and appreciate the increased housing options it brings, others are concerned about the pace of change and negative impacts on the community.
- Respondents emphasise the importance of well-managed, high-quality development that enhances neighbourhoods while preserving green space.

- Respondents identified the southern areas of Banyule as areas requiring further protection of neighbourhood character.
- When asked 'Would you support medium density dwellings in your neighbourhoods if they were of a better-quality design?', 42% responded yes, and 23% responded maybe.

The full report, Housing Discussion Paper Survey Analysis is Attachment 1.

Workshops

- There was mixed feedback for the objectives outlined in the Valuing Housing for All pillar.
- There was strong disagreement with promoting high-density housing, which was seen to be at odds with the heritage of Banyule's suburbs. However, there is strong support for affordable housing targets in new developments, inclusionary zoning, and a focus on environmentally sustainable housing designs.
- Opinions on Council's role in affordable housing were mixed, with some seeing it as a State or Federal responsibility and others hoping to see Council play a more significant role as a facilitator between developers, the community, and the State government.
- Workshop participants were concerned with a perceived surplus of single-bedroom apartments, which are seen as insufficient to accommodate the needs of families, potentially affecting neighbourhood character and diversity.
- There was support for the objectives outlined in the Elevating Good Design pillar.
- Workshop participants appreciated a mix of materials, particularly a mix of brick and wood, and good articulation in housing design. They disliked the excessive use of concrete, cheap materials and developments that do not provide space for vegetation.
- There was support for the objectives outlined in the Valuing Neighbourhood Character pillar. However, there is a desire to see stronger and clearer language to protect neighbourhood character, as concerns were raised over developer influence over what is considered 'preferred neighbourhood character'.

Walking tours

- The presence of trees and greenery was seen as essential to neighbourhood character, and the importance of preserving the natural environment, canopy cover and biodiversity was emphasised.
- Participants expressed a need for design and architecture to reflect and enhance the existing neighbourhood character, with preferences for high-quality materials, unique designs, and features that promote community connectivity and passive surveillance, such as front porches, verandas, and active frontages.
- Participants called for more comprehensive strategic planning and regulatory measures to protect local ecology, ensure appropriate building scale and setbacks, and include detailed guidelines for vegetation.
- There were concerns raised over the size of some medium-density housing developments, which take up the entire block and leave no room for open space or gardens.
- Overall, there was a strong emphasis on the role of Council, acting as an educator and ensuring through planning controls that future developments are designed in a way that is sensitive to the existing local character, promotes ecological and community well-being, and adheres to high standards of urban design and sustainability.

Pop-ups

- Participants preferred well-designed and well-built sustainable homes that positively contribute to and respect neighbourhood character. There were also concerns over imitation style designs and a preference for housing design that fits with the character of the neighbourhood.
- Concerns were raised about the affordability of land impacting both residential and commercial rent costs, with some scepticism regarding the scope of interim housing policies.
- Support for co-housing and 'aging in place' initiatives that foster community and allow residents to downsize while staying in the local area.
- A strong desire for the incorporation of green spaces, privacy, and inclusivity in housing design, with materials that are environmentally friendly and blend naturally with the surroundings.

Advisory groups

- Advisory group members noted the need for affordable and social housing options in Banyule. There were mixed responses regarding the role of Council in the provision of affordable housing. There was support for Council to play a role in facilitating affordable housing. However, some participants noted that economic issues affecting affordability were outside of Council's sphere of influence.
- Advisory group members were concerned with accessibility challenges. They noted the importance of incorporating universal design principles in new developments, particularly in the face of difficulties in modifying homes for older residents and people living with a disability.
- Environmental sustainability in housing was important to members of Council's advisory committees. The groups pointed to a need for energy-efficient design, green spaces, and the integration of sustainability principles into housing development.

Youth survey

- Youth survey respondents appreciate their neighbourhoods in Banyule for open green spaces and proximity to amenities, fostering a strong sense of community and safety.
- A majority of respondents plan to continue living in Banyule due to family ties, community, and local opportunities, while a significant portion contemplates moving elsewhere.
- All respondents agree on the lack of affordable housing for young people, attributing it to broader affordability challenges such as economic factors and inflation.

The Youth Survey responses are considered in the Housing Discussion Paper Survey and Submissions Analysis prepared by Council, see Attachment 1.

Submissions

- Many submissions express concerns about the tension between housing development and the preservation of the historical and aesthetic significance of Banyule's neighbourhoods. This preservation of neighbourhood character is a top priority for several submissions.
- The issue of affordable housing was a significant concern, but there is a call for clearer definitions of what constitutes affordable housing. Additionally, opinions vary on the Council's role in addressing the housing crisis, with some suggesting it should focus on services and infrastructure, while others believe it should play a more active facilitator role.
- Environmental concerns, such as the loss of vegetation, canopy cover, and the impact of poor-quality development on local amenities, were emphasised. Submissions highlight the importance of biodiversity, sustainability, and the protection of natural elements.
- There was a concern that state government policies do not align with the desires of Banyule residents, particularly in terms of neighbourhood character protections, with participants pointing to ResCode and to VCAT's overturning of planning decisions made by the Council as major concerns.

Detailed findings by activity

Pop-ups

3 pop-ups were held around the community, providing an opportunity for members of the community to raise their housing concerns with Council officers and provide feedback on the Housing Discussion Paper. Notes were captured from conversations with participants. Participants were also asked to provide specific feedback on medium-density housing design prompted by photos of recent developments.

General feedback

An analysis of the feedback collected through conversations with the community identified the following key themes:

Housing Design

- *Design flexibility:* Participants feel that apartment buildings need designs that offer more than just vertical growth. They prefer designs that incorporate strong safety measures and communal spaces.
- *Sustainability:* There were calls for construction to consider eco-friendly elements like solar panels and for roofs to be designed to allow the addition of such elements later if not included initially.
- *Building materials:* Participants disapproved of concrete materials due to heat retention during summer.
- *Visual aesthetics:* Participants valued setbacks and articulation. There were concerns with designs such as French provincial and square box designs. People prefer homes that are welcoming to the street to promote community connectivity.

Social and Public Housing

- *Quality and standards:* There is discontent with the standard of social housing, with some calling for the removal and redevelopment of unliveable public housing.
- *Public housing accessibility:* Participants commented that public housing should be close to essential services and public transport.
- *Land use:* Old public housing is seen as an inefficient use of space, and there is a call for better utilisation of these areas.

Affordability Concerns

- *Housing and land affordability:* Some participants suggest the real issue is the affordability of land, not the housing itself.
- *Rent for commercial spaces:* Participants raised concerns over rising land costs, making rents unaffordable for shops and businesses, affecting the local economy.
- *Interim Social and Affordable Housing Policy:* Some community members are concerned that interim policies might overreach the Council's role.

Community and Lifestyle

- *Co-housing:* Support was shown for co-housing initiatives like Murundaka, and their ability to create a sense of community was highlighted.
- *Ageing in place:* Older residents want to downsize but stay in the same area, requiring single-story homes with easy access and small gardens.

What design elements do you like?

- *Sustainability:* Participants highly value the use of sustainable, versatile, and resilient materials in the construction of the housing development. They also appreciate the blending of the built environment with natural elements, favouring materials like timber and brick that integrate well with the natural surroundings.
- *Green spaces and vegetation:* A recurring theme is the importance of preserving existing natural elements like trees and vegetation. Participants appear to prefer developments that not only retain these elements but also include additional plantings around houses. Participants raised the idea that housing should be 'immersed' in green spaces and vegetation.
- *Privacy and inclusivity:* Community members value design elements that enhance privacy, such as setbacks and upper-level features. Additionally, participants show concern for aging populations and disabled residents, preferring flexible internal designs and housing that is inclusive and well-managed.

Advisory Committee briefings

Council officers attended seven Advisory Committee briefings. A summary of the feedback received from each advisory committee can be found below.

Age-friendly Advisory Committee

There were concerns about accessible housing design and support for the focus on accessible design in the discussion paper. There were concerns about the difficulties of ageing in place, with long wait times for home modifications and a perceived lack of knowledge about the process. There were calls for a council-run workshop on downsizing or right-sizing your home. Ideas such as offering boarding or homestays in exchange for young people to assist older residents.

Reconciliation Action Plan Advisory Committee

There were concerns raised about the cost of living, although members of the committee noted this may be outside Council's sphere of influence—other concerns related to the height of buildings and availability of parking. There was support for the idea of alternative housing options such as tiny homes.

Environment and Climate Action Advisory Committee

Feedback from the Environment and Climate Action Advisory Committee primarily revolved around the need for Council to push for higher energy-efficient and sustainable design outcomes, with the current approach seen as too cautious. There was a call for Council to promote environmental sustainability through community housing partnerships and to be mindful of potential conflicts between higher-density development and wildlife corridors. Mandating EV infrastructure in multi-dwelling complexes was recommended, along with other sustainability requirements. There's a need to educate builders and developers about the council's sustainability requirements and to use planning controls and mechanisms to achieve better outcomes. Fast-tracking approval processes and incentives for developers who followed design and sustainability guidelines were suggested. Concerns were raised about the lack of space for canopy trees and gardens in new developments and about young families being priced out of Banyule. The classification of 4-6 level apartment buildings as medium density was also questioned.

Multicultural Advisory Committee

Council's role in facilitating social and affordable housing was discussed, with some members questioning whether this was the responsibility of Council. The potential increase in medium-density housing in areas with predominantly single dwellings and the possibility of increasing height controls near public transport was a concern. The committee members emphasised the importance of good design in future housing projects, expressing dissatisfaction with recent developments. There was confusion about co-housing developments, indicating a need for further clarification. There was support for the objective to expand the range of housing types and tenures in our community, particularly in relation to exploring secondary dwellings.

Inclusivity Advisory Committee

There were concerns raised about affordable and social housing issues, with a suggestion for the creation of a municipality map to identify areas needing more work on affordable housing. Members were interested in clarification of the council's role in social and affordable housing and also raised the need for incentives for developers to create well-designed medium-density housing. Members also highlighted the importance of locating housing near services to reduce transport disadvantage, addressing the issue of gentrification, linking the Inclusive Banyule Strategy to the Driving Housing for All pillar, improving the accessibility of housing for individuals with disabilities, and advocating against factors seen prohibitive to aging in place, such as stamp duty.

Disability and Inclusivity Advisory Committee

Members expressed concerns about the accessibility of older, narrow houses and the high cost of modifications, which are significant barriers for people with disabilities. They emphasised the need for all new housing developments to be accessible and specifically designed without stairs to accommodate individuals with mobility challenges. The potential of tiny houses as a solution for inclusive housing was discussed, with the example of a community of tiny houses in Footscray. The concept of rent-to-buy was supported, as it aids low-income individuals in accessing housing.

LGBTQIA+ Advisory Committee

The challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community and individuals with disabilities in housing and support services were highlighted. The importance of green spaces, public transport connectivity, and environmental sustainability was emphasised. The committee noted the lack of emergency accommodation for people with disabilities and a lack of understanding about environmental sustainability in support services. They also discussed the opportunities for the council and support services to influence developments and operations through planning scheme amendments, partnerships, and integrating environmental sustainability. There is a need for education among developers, real estate agents and landlords about the needs and rights of the LGBTQIA+ community and the importance of environmental sustainability. Lastly, the committee discussed opportunities for partnerships with environmental organisations or initiatives and for the council to influence private housing developments.

Walking tours

The walking tours were a chance for the Council and residents to discuss neighbourhood features while exploring the area. We aimed to understand what residents value in their neighbourhoods and their preferences for future housing designs.

Walking tour #1: Macleod

20 community members attended the tour. An analysis of the feedback collected from this identified the following key themes.

Vegetation and biodiversity

- *Canopy tree preservation:* Community members expressed concern about the removal of trees in new and existing developments, both legally and illegally. The frequent removal of trees during development is a point of contention, raising questions about long-term ecological sustainability.
- *Tokenistic indigenous planting:* Participants felt that current guidelines on indigenous planting are inadequate and often result in superficial compliance without contributing to the local ecology.
- *Landscaping requirements:* There was a strong call for all lots to have trees and for large canopy trees to be part of the landscaping, in part to support local wildlife like owls, parrots, and sugar gliders.

Design and architecture

- *Character inconsistency:* There was a sense among participants that new developments often clash with existing architectural styles, leading to a loss of unique neighbourhood identity.
- *Material quality:* The use of cheap and incongruent materials in new builds is considered detrimental to both aesthetics and long-term value.
- *Exposed features:* Participants raised concerns about exposed features like exposed gas metres, indicating a lack of attention to detail in the design.

Planning and regulations

- *Pre-emptive tree removal:* Concerns were raised that the planning process allows developers to clear the land before submitting plans, affecting local ecology and undermining the community's ability to voice opinions on environmental preservation.
- *Strategic planning:* There is a perceived need for planners with specialised knowledge in ecology and design to inform more sustainable development strategies.
- *Fencing and setbacks:* The community expressed a desire for better fencing provisions and setbacks to allow for green spaces. Concerns were raised with excessive fencing that was out of character for the area and developments that filled entire blocks and left minimal open space.

Community

- *Community connectivity:* Residents raised the impact of the design of new developments, such as the lack of front porches and the prominence of driveways, discouraging community interaction.
- *Passive surveillance:* It was mentioned that the way entrances and porches are designed impacts neighbourhood connectivity and safety. Participants are in favour of more active frontages, noting particularly the importance of corner sites being active on both streets.
- *Educational gaps:* Community members indicated that there needs to be more education for developers, builders, and new residents on issues such as Environmentally Sustainable Design, Biodiversity and neighbourhood Character.

Walking tour #2: Montmorency

4 community members attended the tour. An analysis of the feedback collected from this identified the following key themes.

Vegetation and biodiversity

- *Preserving native trees:* Participants highly value tall canopy and native gum trees, advocating for their preservation. There's a call for Council incentives like rate reductions to encourage the upkeep of large, established trees.
- *Landscaping:* Landscaping, especially with native species, is considered essential for enhancing neighbourhood character and aesthetics.

Design and architecture

- *Design preferences:* Single-lane driveways and unique, high-quality designs are preferred. While modern designs were seen as acceptable, particularly near public transport, Hampton-style developments are considered out of character.
- *Architectural elements:* Features like verandas and eaves are highly desired in new developments.
- *Colour and aesthetics:* Neutral colours and hidden utility services are preferred to maintain a coherent neighbourhood look.

Planning and regulation

- *Detailed planting guidelines:* Participants want specific rules for the types and sizes of trees to be planted.
- *Local topography:* Participants felt that new developments should be integrated into the existing landscape to preserve local character. Concerns were raised with new developments imposed on the valued ridgelines in Banyule.

Community

- *Accepting development:* There's a general understanding that development, especially near public transport, is necessary to accommodate a growing Banyule.
- *Importance of public transport:* Convenient access to public transport is a key concern for new developments.
- *Community connectivity:* Participants were keen to see features such as low fences, curved driveways, and front gardens, as they are considered to be features that contribute positively to community cohesion.

Walking tour #3: Ivanhoe

13 community members attended the tour. An analysis of the feedback collected from this identified the following key themes.

Vegetation and biodiversity

- *Tree canopy cover:* Participants are strongly invested in tree conservation and believe that more trees should be added, particularly in recently developed areas, such as around train stations and on ridges. The focus is on high-canopy trees that contribute to the local character.
- *Landscaping:* Participants appreciate a diverse range of vegetation, from ground cover to canopy, to be better integrated into the landscape plans.
- *Green roofs:* While green roofs are seen as positive for adding vegetation and reducing the building's heat signature, there's also an acknowledgment that these require regular upkeep.

Design and architecture

- *Building design and materials:* There are a range of opinions regarding building materials and colours, but the consensus leans towards having designs and materials that blend well with existing structures. Some members of the community appreciate dark, recessive colours as they have a minimal visual impact on the surroundings.
- *Balconies and community spaces:* Participants value balconies, noting they aren't just architectural features but are seen as tools for community building. They break the uniformity of buildings, add depth to the facade, and provide shared spaces that can foster interactions among residents.
- *Garages and driveways:* Residents are concerned that the prominence of large garages detracts from the overall aesthetic of neighbourhoods. Curved driveways are favoured over straight ones as they add character and soften the appearance of the frontage.

Planning and regulation

- *Setbacks and scale:* Standard setbacks are highly valued, and tiered levels were cited as a way to reduce the apparent scale and bulk of developments. Additionally, they are seen to contribute to a sense of space and openness.
- *Parking:* Private and public parking provisions are viewed as important elements in new developments.
- *Ridgeline assessments:* Assessments were seen as an important regulatory tool that should be considered in planning decisions to preserve the unique character of specific areas and to guide responsible development.

Community

- *Public transport:* Participants view areas in proximity to train stations as underutilised locations for developments and believe proper housing development around them can increase safety and accessibility.
- *Diversity of design:* There was a notable disapproval of 'cookie-cutter' developments that lack character. Participants prefer buildings that offer a variety of lines, textures, and materials, which contribute to a richer, more diverse community environment.
- *Community connectivity:* Spaces that are designed to foster community interaction are highly valued. Whether through balconies, communal gardens, or open spaces, participants believe these features significantly enhance the quality of life and contribute to a sense of community.

Walking tour #4 Heidelberg

7 community members attended the tour, and an analysis of the feedback collected from this identified the following key themes.

Vegetation and biodiversity

- *Soil and plant health:* Concerns were raised about inadequate soil mass for tree planting, leading to calls for soil mass regulation to ensure plant longevity.
- *Vegetation preferences:* Feedback was positive on draping style and cascading plants, but noted that such features are not always well managed.
- *Open spaces and parks:* There is a strong desire for the Council to acquire more land for parks, with participants emphasising that open space should be part of all developments.

Design and architecture

- *Materials:* A mix of diverse materials, such as corrugated concrete, received positive feedback. A combination of materials is seen as positively contributing to the neighbourhood's character.
- *Height and setbacks:* Concerns over the height of multi-unit developments affecting natural features like ridgelines, along with mixed opinions about the appropriateness of setbacks.
- *Facade and appearance:* Criticism centred on blank or dark-coloured facades facing south, whereas well-textured and articulated facades were praised.

Planning and regulation

- *Open space:* Participants strongly felt that open spaces should be a part of all developments, advocating for stronger regulations.
- *Advocacy:* There was a call for state-level intervention for soil mass and sustainable development guidelines. Participants called on Council to advocate for state and federal governments.
- *Activity centres:* Participants felt that specialised planning was necessary for activity centres to promote accessibility, permeability, and communal spaces.

Community workshops

Workshop #1

Workshop #1 was attended by four participants and held in the community meeting rooms at the Council offices in Greensborough. The workshop was organised into three discussions based on the pillars of the Housing Discussion Paper; however, participants preferred to talk more generally about the Discussion Paper. The discussion was: How well do you think the objectives outlined in this pillar will address Banyule's housing needs? Why?

Pillar 1: Driving Housing For All

An analysis of the feedback identified the following themes from the discussion:

Housing types: There is a perception that there are too many single-bedroom apartments that may not meet the needs of families and workers. Participants speculated that the prevalence of single-bedroom units could limit the availability of family homes, impacting the neighbourhood's diversity and character and the ability of families to find suitable housing.

Location and amenities: Participants are sceptical about the promotion of high-density housing in areas like Ivanhoe and were concerned about the absence of amenities such as transport in certain proposed development areas like La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster (NEIC).

Affordability concerns: There is a perception that increasing high-density housing could exacerbate the issue of affordability. With a sense that building more apartments is not the solution to the housing affordability crisis.

Among participants, there was a suggestion that Council advocate to the State Government to find solutions to the crisis.

Role of Council: There are divergent views on the role of Council in affordable housing, with some believing housing to be a state or federal government responsibility, suggesting that the state government should be the one to provide incentives and subsidies while Council act as a facilitator for opportunities in the area between residents and housing providers.

Sustainability: Questions were raised about the sustainability of growth in Banyule, with concerns that increased population pressure would reduce the amenity of the area. Concerns included the loss of open space and parklands to development and infrastructure projects such as the loss of neighbourhood character due to undesirable housing developments.

Feedback on Objectives and Opportunities

Participants provided specific feedback on the objectives outlined in the discussion paper. Their feedback is summarised below:

Objective 1: Increase housing near services and transport to meet the housing needs of a more diverse and growing community.

There is strong disagreement with promoting high-density housing, especially in Ivanhoe, with increased development seen to be at odds with the heritage of the suburb. Concerns were raised about the alignment of infrastructure and housing, particularly in high-development areas, including the La Trobe NEIC, that have low public transport availability.

Objective 2: Help individuals, key workers and families of all income levels to access high-quality housing options.

There was mixed feedback for this objective. While some questioned the Council's role in housing, others saw the opportunity for the Council to facilitate housing partnerships. There is also scepticism about the Council's ability to impact affordable housing significantly. There was discussion around the affordable housing targets of new developments, with concerns that with targets of only 10%, developments would still be largely for-profit and less community-oriented, and the realistic number of affordable housing options would not meaningfully increase.

Objective 3: Expand the range of housing types and tenures in our community:

There was mixed feedback for this objective. While there is support for the focus on the need for multi-room developments, there is disagreement with reducing car parking requirements for affordable housing providers, with concerns that this would negatively impact low-income households who heavily rely on their vehicles for access to employment. Participants noted the great opportunity for housing tenure in options such as granny flats, shared housing, and co-housing and were supportive of promoting these types of initiatives.

Pillar 2: Elevating Good Design

An analysis of the feedback identified the following themes from the discussion:

Sustainability and amenities: The objectives related to sustainable design and quality amenities were generally well-received. The previous inclusion of sustainable design in planning schemes was praised.

Enforcement: There were calls for more concrete rules in planning schemes to make design guidelines enforceable.

Existing character: Concerns were raised that the design should also consider preserving the existing character of the area, especially in places like Ivanhoe.

Feedback on Objectives and Opportunities

Objective 1: Promote good design that meets the varying needs of the community while also meeting other objectives like sustainability and neighbourhood character:

There was a call to ensure that good design has appropriate amenities. There is scepticism about how effective forums could be without changes to the planning scheme, but support for improving design outcomes through collaboration.

Objective 2: Promote functional and sustainable living:

Participants were generally supportive of this objective and had no specific feedback.

Objective 3: High and medium-density buildings promote cohesive, sustainable and liveable communities:

Participants were not supportive of this objective because of their opposition to high and medium-density developments. Participants felt infill development is detrimental to the neighbourhood character.

Objective 4: Ensure the accessibility and usability of housing for people of all ages and abilities:

There is general support for this objective.

Pillar 3: Valuing Preferred Neighbourhood Character

An analysis of the feedback identified the following themes from the discussion:

Protecting neighbourhood character: General support for protecting and defining neighbourhood character.

Community involvement and influence: Concerns were raised that the community should have a say in what is considered a 'preferred' character without influence from developers.

Clarity of terminology: Participants suggested clearer language and terms that could not be easily overridden.

Feedback on Objectives and Opportunities

Participants provided specific feedback on the objectives outlined in the Discussion Paper, their feedback is summarised below:

Objective 1: New residential buildings support local identity and a sense of place:

Participants agreed on reviewing neighbourhood character precincts but had concerns about the term 'preferred' as it could be subjective. However, there were concerns that the creation of 'sub-precincts' might lead to unwanted development in residential areas.

Objective 2: Ensure that new residential buildings meet preferred character requirements.

Participants supported clarification in design and development guidance but wanted stronger language and terms that reflect community sentiment. There is support for increasing Council resourcing to support greater influence in protecting Neighbourhood Character and supporting cohesive design.

Workshop #2

The focus of this workshop was testing some key questions with the community. The questions were aligned with the pillars of the Discussion Paper as the workshop was broken up into 3 major discussions: Driving Housing for All, Elevating Good Design and Preferred Neighbourhood Character. Following a presentation by Council officers on the Housing Discussion Paper, participants took some time to reflect on the information that was provided. Then, they held group discussions at their tables on the key questions that were raised. Feedback was captured via post-its notes and on butcher paper by table hosts.

Driving Housing for All

Key questions:

- What role should Council play in the provision of affordable housing?
- Identify what you see as the biggest challenges for addressing housing affordability.
- Identify what you see as the biggest opportunities for addressing housing affordability.

What role should Council play in the provision of affordable housing?

An analysis of the feedback collected from this identified the following key themes.

- *Eligibility and scope:* Questions arose around who is eligible and whether affordable housing should be targeted in specific areas.
- *Land use:* Concerns were raised about using council land for social housing, given the competing needs for land such as parks and community facilities.
- *Amenity and quality:* The importance of amenities in social and affordable housing, housing quality, and concerns about high-rise development were raised with concerns about the liveability of new developments.
- *Council's role:* There was a discussion about whether the Council can or should mandate affordable housing in new housing developments, with no clear consensus.
- *Programs and initiatives:* We heard ideas like advocating to the State government for programs to alleviate rental stress, working on the diversity of housing types and facilitating affordable housing discussions.

Identify what you see as the biggest challenges for addressing housing affordability.

- *Community opposition:* Tensions and concerns were raised around car parking, height limits, and land utilisation.
- *Land availability:* There is a perception that Banyule lacked available land for development, and concerns were raised about selling of open space or council assets for housing developments
- *Council's role:* Among participants, there were perceived limitations on what the council can meaningfully achieve in the face of the national housing crisis.

Identify what you see as the biggest opportunities for addressing housing affordability

- *Design Flexibility:* Participants were keen to see affordable housing developments not limited to high-rise developments, instead hoping to see cohesive developments and minimal heights that respected the character of the neighbourhoods.
- *Regulatory Measures:* Mandating social and affordable housing targets in new housing developments and exploring opportunities for inclusionary zoning.
- *Sustainability:* Focusing on climate-friendly housing through the design and use of sustainable materials and the retention of important canopy trees and vegetation.

Elevating Good Design

Key questions

- Why do some developments 'work' while others don't?
- What are the key elements that make the difference?

Why do some developments 'work' while others don't?

- *Design Quality:* The importance of material quality, builder skill, and architectural design were all seen as the drivers behind successful housing developments—particular aspects that participants noted were articulation of buildings, use of quality materials and landscaping.
- *Neighbourhood compatibility:* How well the development fits into its neighbourhood is a major concern for participants.
- *Sustainability:* The use of sustainable materials and passive design techniques to reduce heat islands and increase canopy cover is important.

- *Regulatory obstacles:* Challenges due to existing state regulations were raised, with some concerns that state regulations would make it difficult for the Council to enforce design standards.

What are the key elements that make the difference?

- *Open Space and Environment:* Garden spaces, trees, and setbacks were seen as important in housing developments. Integrating developments with vegetation and respecting canopy trees were important for participants.
- *Articulation and design:* Sensitive setbacks and creative design were seen as defining factors in the acceptance of new developments. Concerns were raised with the size of developments, with some extending right up to the boundaries of properties.
- *Sustainability:* Genuine Environmentally Sustainable Design is seen to make a big difference, with energy efficiency and environmentally sustainable materials and building practises a priority.
- *Community and Culture:* Developments that showed respect for neighbourhood character and positively contributed to passive surveillance and community connectivity were valued.

Valuing Preferred Neighbourhood Character

Key questions

- What do you value about your neighbourhood?
- What would you like to see more of in your neighbourhood?

What do you value about your neighbourhood?

- *Built and Natural Environment:* Participants valued architectural diversity and green spaces. They particularly appreciated historic buildings, unique house designs, tree-lined streets and an abundance of local parks, emphasising that these elements contribute to a sense of place and identity.
- *Services and Amenities:* Proximity to essential services like grocery stores, healthcare centres, and schools was frequently mentioned. Additionally, accessibility to recreational facilities, such as parks and community centres, and the availability of public transport were seen as major assets.
- *Community and Diversity:* The presence of a strong, supportive community was often highlighted. Residents value cultural diversity, friendly neighbours, and community events. They like that their neighbourhoods offer a mix of residential and commercial spaces that cater to a diverse demographic, enhancing social cohesion.

What would you like to see more of in your neighbourhood?

- *Sustainability:* There's a strong call for sustainable practices like more effective waste management, the introduction of community gardens, and the use of renewable energy in public spaces. Residents would also like to see additional green spaces and more trees planted to create an eco-friendly environment.
- *Design and Architecture:* Community members often expressed the desire for urban planning that values aesthetics as well as function. They wish to see not just sustainable housing but also buildings that maintain or enhance the existing architectural fabric. The restoration of old or run-down houses to preserve neighbourhood character was also mentioned.
- *Community and Amenities:* There is a demand for more community spaces, like plazas and parks, where residents can gather for public events or casual meet-ups. Features like pet-friendly parks, children's play areas, and public art installations were also suggested.

Email submissions

Six submissions were received from individuals and community groups in Banyule, an overview of each submission is provided below.

Submission 1:

This submission from a resident of Banyule highlights the tension between housing development and the preservation of neighbourhood character, noting the historical and aesthetic significance of many areas in Banyule. It also criticises the State Government's planning rules, such as ResCode and the role of VCAT,

particularly related to the overturning of Council planning decisions that the community supported. While the submission highlights the lack of affordable housing, particularly in the middle suburbs, it does question the definition of affordable housing provided by Council, asking for a clearer definition of the term. Concerns were raised over the loss of vegetation and canopy cover associated with poor-quality development.

Submission 2:

This submission from a resident of Banyule provides feedback on the role of Council in the provision of affordable housing, commentary on the character and design of housing developments in Banyule, and shares some criticisms with the online survey. Primarily, the submission argues that Council's role in housing is to provide services and infrastructure rather than solve the housing crisis, noting that actions such as reserving land for open space and advocating to state government should be the extent of Council's actions. Feedback was also provided on a number of multi-unit and single-dwelling designs, valuing vegetation, building articulation and a mix of different materials and setbacks. The submission argues that the online survey was complex and required a detailed understanding of the issues to provide an informed response. Finally, the submission questions definitions of medium-density housing, noting the definition provided is unclear regarding height of medium-density housing.

Submission 3:

This submission from a resident of Banyule includes commentary on population density across Banyule, questions Council definitions of medium-density housing, points to a correlation between housing density and a lack of amenities or access to open space and noting the importance of tree ratios and canopy cover. The submission notes that areas such as Rosana, Macleod and Ivanhoe are growing rapidly and do not require additional infill development while citing Greensborough as an area that could support further growth. Additionally, the submissions point to heat islands in Banyule, particularly Heidelberg Heights, which the submission notes lacks amenities and access to open space.

Submission 4:

This submission broadly supports the discussion paper but is particularly critical of Council's role in the provision of housing and opposed to medium and high-density developments in the Southern parts of Banyule. The submission supports Council planning for housing for all ages and incomes but notes that the provision of housing is a State Government responsibility. The submission raises state government policy, noting it is not aligned with the desires of Banyule residents, particularly the impact of ResCode on neighbourhood character, calling for Council to advocate to the State Government for increased Neighbourhood character protections.

There is apprehension toward promoting high-density apartment-style units due to their high costs and maintenance. The submission emphasises the importance of maintaining local identity in new residential developments. Furthermore, concerns are voiced about significant neighbourhood character loss, including the removal of tall canopy trees and the poor quality of new developments. The submission supports objectives related to elevating good design, highlighting the need for height reductions, and protection for vegetation, canopy cover and building articulation.

Submission 5:

This submission highlights the tension between the need for additional housing and the desire to maintain the character and amenities of existing neighbourhoods. The submission expresses opposition to the proposed increase in population density in Banyule. It suggests that additional housing should be constructed in regional cities and centres instead of Banyule to accommodate for population increases. Concerns about the potential impact of increased population density on local amenities, trees, and vegetation were raised. The submission disagrees with several proposed measures, including supporting affordable housing projects, considering under-utilised council land for affordable housing, and helping people of all income levels access high-quality housing options. However, they strongly agree with actions supporting biodiversity and sustainability.

Submission 6:

The submission provides feedback on the Housing and Neighbourhood Character survey, arguing that the survey is too focused on Greensborough, Ivanhoe and Heidelberg. The submission suggests that demographic predictions shared in the discussion paper were out of date. Suggesting there is a need to adapt to demographic changes and reconsider high-density housing along train lines. Additionally, the submission suggests that Council develop individual structure plans for each suburb along the train lines to provide the residents an opportunity for input about high-density housing in their particular suburb.

Co-housing outreach

One interview was held with a resident of a Co-Housing initiative based in Heidelberg Heights. The discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities of co-housing projects. It was noted that these projects often face opposition from communities and Council due to misconceptions and concerns about their impact. The numerous benefits of co-housing were discussed, including shared resources, community support, and affordable living. There is a need for increased public awareness and understanding of co-housing, as well as more active support from local councils. The discussion also emphasised the potential of co-housing to provide stable, affordable housing for vulnerable groups, such as single mothers and older women. Furthermore, the importance of clear communication and involvement in neighbourhood development projects was highlighted. The participant would like to see more involvement from Council in educating the public about co-housing and facilitating more co-housing projects.