

# Heidelberg Structure Plan: Community Engagement Summary

December 2021



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The draft Heidelberg Structure Plan (the Plan) was endorsed for community and stakeholder consultation at the Ordinary Council Meeting on 20 September 2021. This was the third and final stage of community engagement since the project commenced in February 2020.

Stage 1 consultation assessed the performance of the Centre. Two surveys to measure value and assess performance were completed as part of the Heidelberg Liveability Study, with 768 insights shared by the community<sup>1</sup>. The study provides important benchmark data of what the community value and ranks how important certain issues are to people. This allowed Council to focus additional background work around the issues most important to Heidelberg's community. It also helps us to measure future progress of the structure plan in terms of how it responds to what the community identified as most important to the liveability of the Centre. In addition, the technical background analysis and research, including the Economic Analysis, Built Form Review and Movement and Place Options Plan, included targeted stakeholder consultation.

Stage 2 was consolidating the key findings and recommendations from community consultation, stakeholder input and the technical background documents into a Key Directions Paper. This supported further consultation with the community and key stakeholders, including the hospitals, Heidelberg Retail Trader's Association, and schools. This stage also trialled place making initiatives, such as parklets and a pop up park, to support post COVID-19 recovery and community reconnection. Evaluation of these pilot projects has informed many of the open space strategies outlined in the 'Places for People' section.

## 1.1 CONSULTATION ON THE PLAN

Once the Plan was endorsed by Council for consultation, the third stage of community engagement took place from 21 September to 19 October 2021. The engagement took place during full COVID-19 restrictions and methods employed were tailored to these conditions.

### Engagement tools

An interactive project page on Shaping Banyule was the main engagement tool, with the draft Plan, online survey, technical background documents and a live Q&A form. Community information sessions were offered, and stakeholder workshops held. Council supported the engagement via 2 social media posts to highlight the consultation period. This supported the direct mail out.

Over 3500 letters were sent via mail and email. This included:

- Commercial, retail and hospitality traders and the Heidelberg Central Manager
- Property owners, occupiers and managers
- Sporting groups, community groups and organisations
- Hospitals
- Various State Government agencies and authorities, including Department of Transport, Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, Department of Jobs, Precincts & Regions, Victorian Planning Authority, North East Link Authority, Suburban Rail Loop Authority, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water.

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<sup>1</sup> See [Click this link for Consultation Summary - via Shaping Banyule website](#) or

[Click here for full Liveability Study by Place Score \(on behalf of Banyule City Council\)](#)

- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- State MP Anthony Carbines
- La Trobe University, Manningham and Darebin City Councils

As seen in Figure 1 below, the analytics for Shaping Banyule reveal that a total of 511 unique visitors viewed the pages over 779 visits. 41 submissions were made in total. Figure 2 shows the source of interaction with the Shaping Banyule website, which reveals that people predominantly came directly to the page (34.26% of visitors) or via social media posts (30.56%) – meaning that the mail out and social media campaigns were most likely effective in engaging people further in the project<sup>2</sup>.

There were two options available for people to make a submission. The first was the survey form which included qualitative questions specific to the vision, key themes and precinct strategies and objectives. There were open-ended comments sections to provide further detail or other thoughts. Updates were made on Council's social media platforms to promote the opportunity to give feedback on the draft Plan.

Of these, 26 contributions were received via the Shaping Banyule survey form. 5 direct submissions were made from organisations and 3 from businesses. The remainder were direct submissions made by individuals who were residents within the study area. Feedback was also gathered through individual discussions, community information sessions and workshops, including a cultural consultation with the Wurundjeri.

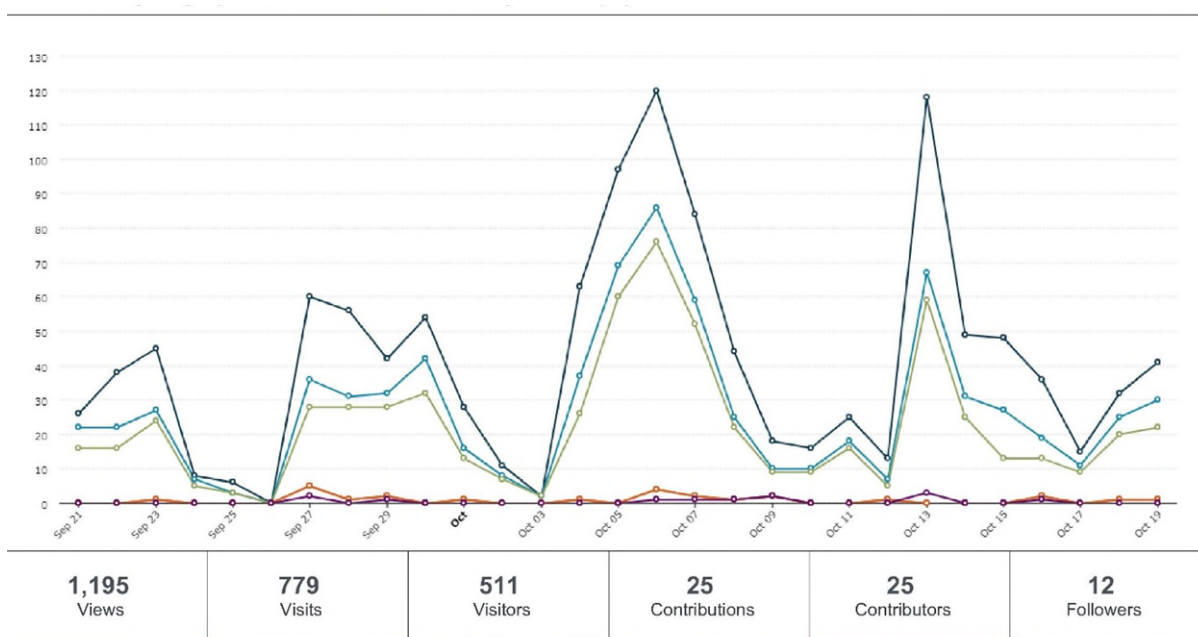


FIGURE 1: SHAPING BANYULE VISITATION METRICS FOR STAGE 3 CONSULTATION

<sup>2</sup> This can only be an assumption. Without surveying every individual about what triggered their reasons for engaging we cannot be conclusive here, however the fact that engagement activity rose substantially in response to mail and social media campaigns would likely indicate their effectiveness at raising interest in the project.

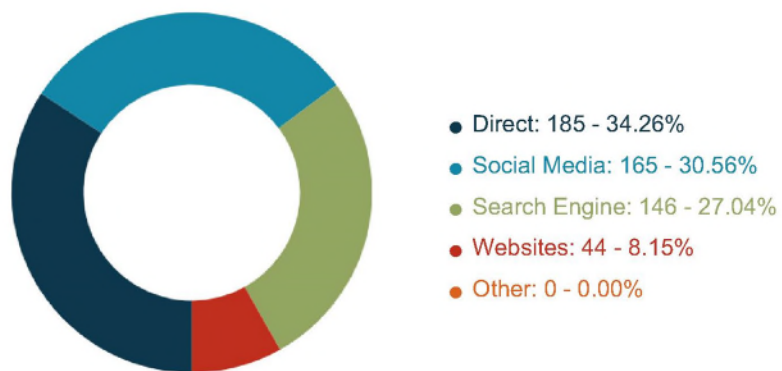


FIGURE 2: SITE TRAFFIC REFERRAL

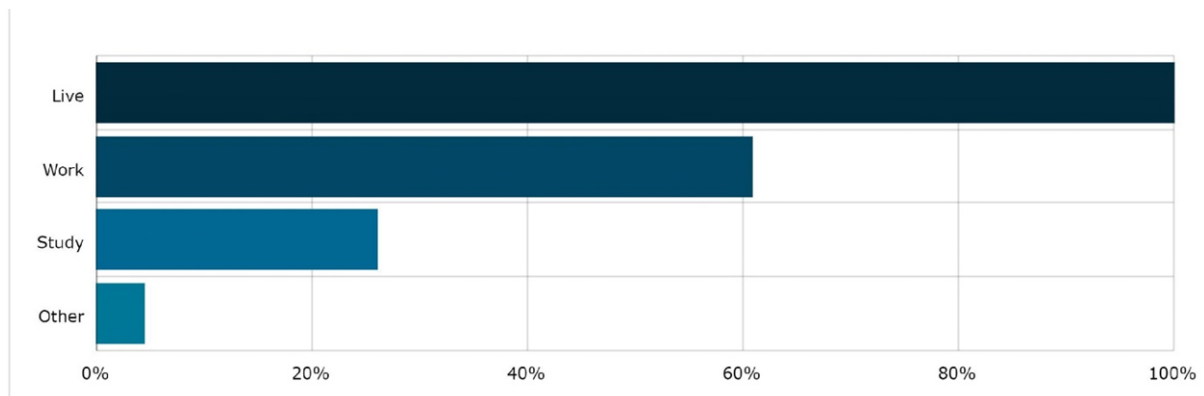


FIGURE 3: RELATIONSHIP TO BANYULE – SHAPING BANYULE SURVEY DATA



Most submissions made through the survey form were by residents. See Figure 4 for further breakdown. The responses were all similar in terms of strongly disagreeing and disagreeing with most of the draft Plan including the visions and precinct strategies.

## Limitations

Like many projects over the last 18+ months, this project has been affected by strict COVID-19 restrictions, including the inability to hold face-to-face meetings or conduct in-person surveys or promotion of the Plan for much of the time.

Engagement on the draft Structure Plan was confined to online platforms as outlined above and supported by a letter mail out.

The website analytics for Shaping Banyule indicate that good numbers of people accessed information, while social media posts will have raised the awareness and profile of the project.

The limited number of submissions is somewhat surprising given the level of website traffic, however; there are no obvious indications that there were any challenges with accessing information, understanding how to make a submission or the time period for consultation. Council received no feedback about any limitations, and it can be assumed that people were satisfied with what was made available to them.

It is acknowledged that it has been a tough and enduring period for business owners, health practitioners and everyone in our community. Levels of stress, fatigue, higher personal or business priorities, engagement fatigue (the need to engage often through multiple online forums) could all reasonably be highlighted as challenges throughout this time and it is hard to determine the precise impacts on a project of this nature.

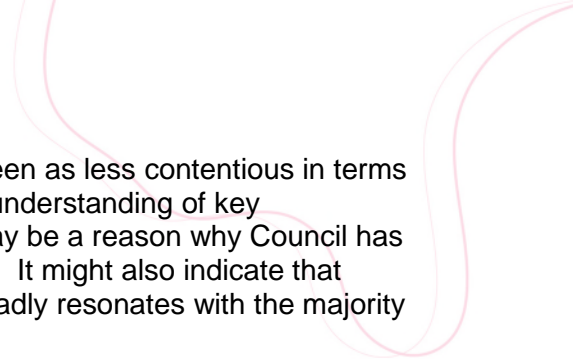
Offers of online webinars/ forums for people to join and connect with officer-led presentations were met with limited interest. One session on the 9 October 2021 was cancelled due to nobody signing up. Once again, Council did not receive any correspondence or was made aware of any issues, complications or hesitation around online engagement.

The move to online only engagement has been necessary more broadly for Council to keep projects moving. Equally, the accessibility of information and the emerging preferences of people to access information when they want to and to make submissions digitally without the need to attend in-person meetings has been occurring for some time now, prior to COVID-19. Without doubt, the increasing familiarity with digital tools and engagement platforms has been fast tracked by COVID. Overall digital literacy, competency and acceptance of this as a primary method of providing information and receiving submissions has become more 'normalised'. It enables Council to reach a broad section of the community and allows people to have their voice which, compared to more traditional forms of engagement, is generally seen as a positive outcome. Nonetheless, it is unfortunate that the ability to engage on a face-to-face basis has severely impacted on many Council projects in recent times.

## 1.2 OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ENGAGEMENT

Engagement was embedded into the preparation of the new Heidelberg Structure Plan from the outset and has endured throughout the project to date. The previously mentioned Liveability Study was a significant piece of engagement that was done 'up-front' to shape the rest of the process and provides the benchmark data for not just the draft structure plan but the future focus for Council work in the Centre. People shared their views very early and in a compelling way.

It is also highlighted that this is not a new structure plan. Rather, it represents a 'refresh' or review of the existing (2010 Structure Plan) to bring it up-to-date. In this regard, many of the major issues about the principles of change, built form, land use or transport were tackled during the preparation



of the earlier plan. This may have resulted in this revision being seen as less contentious in terms of the type of challenges it is needing to address. Familiarity and understanding of key stakeholders and the community with this type of structure plan may be a reason why Council has received only a moderate number of submissions this time around. It might also indicate that regular engagement and the content of the draft structure plan broadly resonates with the majority of those who have participated in the process to date.

Finally, a planning scheme amendment process to put forward the planning controls into the planning scheme ensures that there will be another statutory period of engagement required. This will test the specific land use and built form controls for each precinct. In this regard, there is assurance that engagement will be extensive and as complete as it can be for every stage of the project.

## 2 KEY SUBMISSION THEMES AND PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE DRAFT PLAN

Feedback on the overall Plan varied from it being a comprehensive and ambitious document to one that was short sighted, and misguided. Generally, there is a clear delineation between people that lived and worked in the area being more critical of change to the Centre, whilst the agencies, organisations and some businesses that responded gave in-principle support to the overall strategic direction, objectives and actions proposed.

The following section provides a more detailed summary and response of the key themes raised. Some submissions included comments that were outside the scope of the Plan and these have been noted and will be addressed through other avenues.

### 2.1 THE FRAMEWORK

The Framework Plan provides four key themes that apply to the entire Structure Plan area. These are: Activity and Land Use, Built Form and Character, Access and Connection and Places for People (Public Realm and Open Space).



3. The Framework Plan comprises four key themes that apply across the whole Structure Plan area. These are: Activity and land use, Built form, Access and connection and Places for People: Public Realm and Open Space.

Matrix | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 24 (100%)

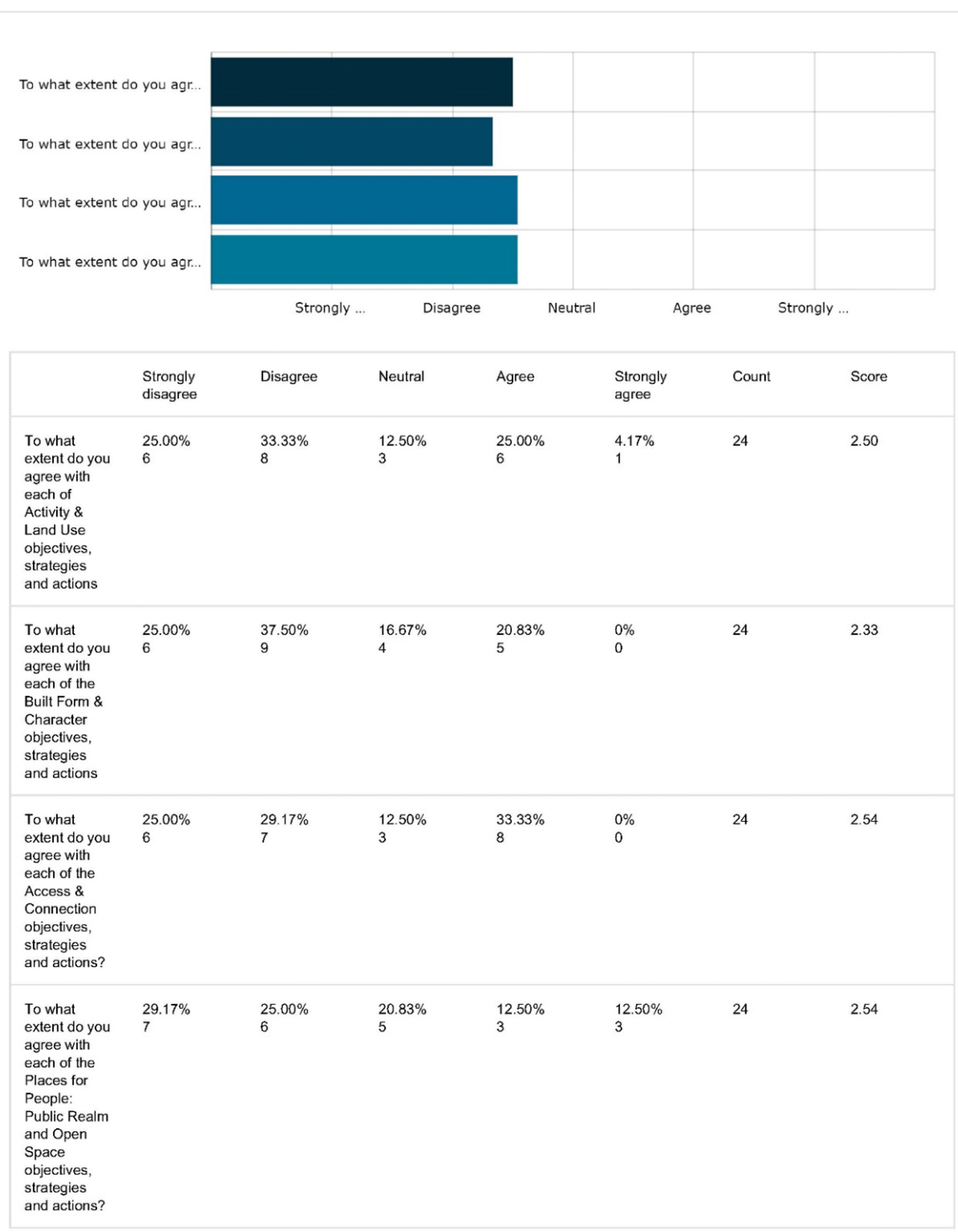


FIGURE 4: SURVEY RESPONSES TO THE FRAMEWORK PLAN

## 2.2 ACTIVITY AND LAND USE

### Summary

Responses for Activity and Land Use were limited – noting that no major changes are proposed to the land uses in the existing precincts. One submission questioned the Centre as having two distinct economies and thought it should be expanded to the public service or a green economy, and that the Plan should include more community and recreation facilities in this precinct. Another submission raised the need for housing diversity to include accommodation needs for families with school age children. There was support for flexible, short-term accommodation options around the health precinct, and for opportunities to explore the interfaces of the commercial precinct for health services staff, patients and visitors.

### Response

The rationale for supporting a dual economy in Centre comes from the Heidelberg Economic Analysis and should be kept in place to be the key driver for investment and job growth. Within this however, the role of civic/commercial uses to the overall economy of the Centre, just not as significant a contributor. Council is undertaking a review of community assets (such as halls) which will guide future investment and renewal, whilst broader direction for recreation and cultural elements are already included throughout the Plan. Additional strategies around flexible uses and 'softer edges' between the health and other precincts can be strengthened.

### Proposed Changes

- ✓ Increased housing diversity section to include 'short-term accommodation' to be located in close proximity to hospitals i.e. serviced apartments, hotels.
- ✓ Ensure that existing character of lower-scale (single and 2-storey dwellings) in sensitive areas of the Residential Precincts are retained.
- ✓ Include a new strategy that encourages a 'soft edge' on Upper Heidelberg Road between the residential and health precinct with mixed use, that includes flexible accommodation options. medical & ancillary use as well as residential.

## 2.3 BUILT FORM AND CHARACTER

### Summary

The majority of submissions made from those who are residents strongly objected to the proposed increase in building heights, citing the poor quality of recent developments, overdevelopment and the loss of valued neighbourhood character. Of particular sensitivity and garnering differing opinions were the western side of the Centre, in particular the Health Precinct, the Bell St Gateway and the residential streets within and surrounding these two precincts. This is where most of the highest density has been directed and will continue with the current pipeline of development. From the community, the increased heights and density were strongly opposed. In contrast, submissions made on behalf of developers (and current land holders), and hospitals thought the preferred heights were too low and more flexibility was required.

### Response

It is State Government Planning Policy to direct higher density residential and mixed-use developments to Activity Centres. It is also a challenge within the current housing market to provide housing diversity, affordability and options for a range of people, including those entering the housing market or those who may be looking to 'age in place' without needing to leave their local area or the municipality.

Council must demonstrate that the Structure Plan adheres to State Planning policy, but also find an appropriate balance that provides for population growth, housing diversity and affordability without impacting the liveability of the Centre. The submissions raised by residents, particularly in and around areas where the majority of high-density mixed use and residential development has been constructed or has planning approval, has prompted further review of the proposed heights (especially north-west of Burgundy/Bell). It is proposed that the height and setback allowed under the existing General Residential Zone Schedules 1 and 2 be retained. For example, those precincts currently within GRZ2 will have the same height and setback within a schedule to the ACZ (11m).

The height limits proposed have not been increased along Burgundy Street, Bell Street and Upper Heidelberg Road, as requested by several submissions, as the heights in this area underwent significant review and built form testing that justifies the discretionary height limit. It strikes the appropriate balance between accommodating future residential growth and other land use requirements and protecting and contributing to neighbourhood character through well-designed and sensitive developments.

Many of the concerns relate to detailed design, or lack thereof. The Plan, as a high-level strategic document, is not intended to provide built form controls. Rather, it sets out the policy context and built form framework that will inform updated planning controls in the Banyule Planning Scheme. Good design is important, including the interface with buildings at street level and the human experience in that environment. It will be important that buildings have a human scale, while aspects such as activation, safety and, increasingly greening and softening of the urban landscape, are key focus areas for new planning controls that will be developed for Heidelberg. It is anticipated that this will be supported by a Banyule Good Design Guide to ensure better quality outcomes are achieved across the municipality to address a range of key objectives.

## Proposed Changes

- ✓ Preferred maximum heights decreased in parts of Residential Precincts and Yarra Valley Open Space Precinct.
- ✓ Setbacks increased for higher density developments in Bell Street Gateway, to better respond to sensitive residential interface.
- ✓ Change identified commercial land along Upper Heidelberg Road to mixed use.
- ✓ Action added around advertising signage not dominating buildings, detrimentally affect the character or amenity of adjacent visually sensitive residential areas, or visually impact on identified key views.
- ✓ New strategy added on avoiding underdevelopment and uses that are not consistent with the vision, or the preferred or mandatory maximum height of the relevant precinct.
- ✓ More guidance around heritage buildings and precincts including showing them in plans.
- ✓ New strategy to avoid large blank walls and uniform front facades along laneways, side streets and open spaces.
- ✓ New strategy to encourage consolidation of narrower sites to allow for better design outcomes without the need for every site to reach maximum height and provide an appropriate built form transition to the adjoining residential areas
- ✓ New actions to make a clearer connection to how the Plan will be translated into the Banyule Planning Scheme, including the preparation of a planning scheme amendment to apply appropriate planning controls, such as the Activity Centre Zone, to identified land within the Structure Plan study area. The amendment process will include full exhibition and further opportunity for residents, organisations and other stakeholders to make submissions.

The Future Building Height plan has had the following changes:

- The Gateway precinct updated to include the additional section along UHR as per updated land use framework map (and show on main precinct maps). The height is proposed as 16m for residential and 20 m for the mixed use (previously commercial).
- Along the Bell Street section, the height limit has been reduced from 23 to 20m to better manage transition to lower scale residential.
- Residential sections abutting Bell Street, along Rosanna Road, Jika/Dora and between Darebin and Cartmell Streets have been changed to 11m (3 storeys) which is consistent with the existing General Residential Zone.
- Where the DDO2 already applies (Vine Street) as part of the Yarra River controls the Plan will not apply any changes.

## 2.4 ACCESS AND CONNECTION

### Summary

Submissions strongly supported improvements to walkability and cyclability in the Centre. Concerns related to current pedestrian safety, poor quality of footpaths lack of connection to green open space and cycling safety and there was general consensus towards prioritizing pedestrian, cycling and public transport connections. Two submissions wanted more priority given to public car parking. Concern over traffic congestion and pedestrian, cyclist safety, especially around schools, especially during pick up and drop off times.

The submission from La Trobe University gave specific support to the proposed strategies and actions to increase bus access to the campus. It also recognised the importance of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) to provide direct access between La Trobe University and Heidelberg but highlighted the need to bring forward development of the SRL to service La Trobe University. Their submission further emphasized the need for coordinated and integrated active transport within the La Trobe NEIC, and, to enhance bicycle interconnectivity of major employment hubs, such as Austin Health, and the La Trobe Bundoora Campus.

The North East Link Authority (NELA) made a submission including naming convention, having a reference design for the North East Link Project (NELP) alignment and some annotations to the pedestrian section.

### Response

Most of the key points here are agreed with, and there are multiple strategies and actions already in the Plan based on improving the pedestrian and cycling experience and promoting public transport. Further changes to the Plan have been made that strengthen this even further.

The NELP reference design has not been provided by NELA to Council at the time of drafting the Plan but can be added later. In relation to NELA's other comments, there appears to be a misunderstanding around the terms of their legal settlement which resulted in both Banyule and Manningham Councils being allocated funding for the design of an SUP south of Banksia St to Burke Rd North (\$100k to BCC) and, design and construction of pedestrian/cyclist bridge over the Yarra River in the vicinity of Yarra St (\$5.8M to MCC). Therefore, this section does not require updating.

Transport advocacy will be informed by the preferred outcomes identified by the draft Structure Plan and will be carried into appropriate forums, funding bids and discussions with the State Government.

### Proposed Changes

- ✓ Additional content on cycling and walking added to 2.1.4
- ✓ Improve how walkability is shown between north/south connections for Residential 6a precinct.
- ✓ Section 2.1.4 updated to include improved pedestrian and cycling access between La Trobe University and the Centre.

## 2.5 PLACES FOR PEOPLE: PUBLIC REALM & OPEN SPACE

### Summary

Land uses need to include a role for enhancing biodiversity conservation and protection and enhancement of cultural values with significant softening and setbacks.

More open space and better connections to existing quality open space for residents and workers alike was raised in several submissions.

One submission wanted Service Reserve to be better utilised. The upkeep of many open spaces/public realm was a concern, with rubbish and graffiti frequently cited examples that were negatively impacting the amenity. There was strong support for more place activation and break out spaces, especially in Heidelberg Central.

### Response

It is agreed that the importance of the Yarra River should be further emphasized. The need for more open space to support the increasing residential population to the west of the Centre should also be better reflected in the Plan. Maintenance of existing open space are not within the scope of the Structure Plan and are addressed through Council's operational arm.

### Proposed Changes

- ✓ Breakout box focused on the importance of the Yarra (Birrarung) River.
- ✓ New strategy added to investigate opportunities for new open space to accommodate the increased residential population to the north of Bell/Banksia. Reference is also made to the Public Realm strategy and how it is to be implemented.
- ✓ Additional text to around improved access to the Yarra (Birrarung) River parklands as regionally significant open space.



## 2.6 PRECINCTS

Only where precincts received targeted feedback have they been included in this summary. Although there are comments relating to the Commercial and Civic, and Heidelberg Central Precinct (particularly around heights and interface with adjoining sensitive areas – residential, heritage, open space) the response and proposed changes have been covered in the Framework Plan sections.

### Yarra Valley Open Space Precinct

The strongest criticism for this precinct was that it did not reflect the importance of the Yarra River, was inconsistent with the Yarra Strategic Plan and, that the environmental, landscape and cultural values should be a priority. More emphasis on stormwater management to improve water way health, and more sensitive interface was also recommended. The need for improved connectivity and inclusiveness was highlighted and linked back into the 'Places for People' and 'Access and Connections' section.

The objectives and strategies proposed align with the Yarra Strategic Plan and Bulleen LUFP (both waiting Ministerial approval at the time of writing) as well as providing for the significant open space needs of the residents, workers and visitors to the Centre. The importance of improving pedestrian and cycling access to open space, protecting the cultural heritage and ecological values within the corridor, WSUD infrastructure and canopy trees are emphasized throughout the Plan. It is worth noting that in the final draft Yarra Strategic Plan the Centre is recognised as *'a focal point for increased development; supporting a range of commercial, residential and community land uses'*.

### Health Precinct

A Health Precinct Alliance was established in 2020 to provide a more coordinated approach to transport and land use planning for this precinct. Several meetings and workshops have been conducted over the past 12 months with the major hospitals to ensure their active input into the development of the draft Plan. The hospitals have provided in principal support of the proposed vision and strategies to deliver a world class health precinct, although it was recommended that the relationship with La Trobe University be more strongly emphasized. Detailed comments were provided by Ramsay Health relating to setbacks and heights and they requested that built form provisions of any future planning controls in the Health Precinct should be discretionary. There was also the recommendation to improve 'soft edges' of the precinct and provide active frontages for development to promote permeability and passive surveillance.

### Bell Street Gateway and Residential Precincts

Most of the submissions that gave comment on this precinct were concerned with the impacts on adjacent residential precinct. After further review of this precinct several height adjustments have been made as well as including the section along Upper Heidelberg Road to be within this Precinct. This includes reducing the height along the Bell Street section from 23 to 20m to better manage transition to lower scale residential and reducing much of the adjacent residential precinct to 11m, in keeping with the existing GRZ.

The Gateway vision has also been revised to focus on high architectural standard and design quality that contributes to the public realm and more sensitively balanced with surrounding residential areas.

## 2.7 MINOR CHANGES TO THE DRAFT STRUCTURE PLAN

Several graphic errors in the plans were identified (e.g. key sites missing, incorrect shading and features missing in the base map) that have been rectified. There were also additional content updates, such as rearranging some strategies and actions, and ensuring consistency with the Built Form Review recommendations. Text edits and updates to names, for example, changing Allied Health Precinct to consistently just use the term '*Health Precinct*' and North East Link (NEL) to *NELP*, were done as well. This final draft version has also been graphically redesigned to be a more visually engaging and legible document.