



Part 1: Background and context

1.1. Purpose

Activity centres have been part of Melbourne’s pattern of development for decades. They fill diverse roles—including retail, commercial, civic services and housing and are a focus for services, employment and social interaction.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide an over-arching policy framework to inform planning, place making, economic development and decision-making about activity centres in Hobsons Bay, as well as to attract and direct public and private investment, for the greatest community benefit while also being aspirational.

The Hobsons Bay Activity Centres Strategy 2019-36 (Activity Centres Strategy) translates the Victorian Government’s metropolitan planning strategy, Plan Melbourne 2017-50 to the local context and complements other work at the municipal level. It ensures that Hobsons Bay directs growth and manages renewal in activity centres in a way that supports centres to realise their potential and develop in sustainable and suitable ways that are responsive to local issues, centre function and identity.

This strategy is founded on an understanding of Hobsons Bay’s current Local Activity Centres Network in the broader context of the Melbourne region, and will assist in attracting, directing, advocating for, and guiding investment, both public and private, into local centres.

1.2. Creating this strategy

Engagement

The Strategy has been informed by a comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement process including:

- three drop-in sessions including a community survey
- an online resident and business survey
- stakeholder interviews
- multiple workshops with Council staff
- face-to-face meetings with trader group representatives from Altona, Laverton, Newport and Williamstown
- discussions with private stakeholders including retailers, developers, and shopping centre owners

The consultation process explored current shopping and visitation patterns while inviting broader feedback from the community on issues relevant to activity centres in Hobsons Bay.

The consultation outcomes served as one input into the development of a Technical Report prepared by Essential Economics Pty Ltd in association with Hansen Partnership and Martyn Group.

Technical Report

The Technical Report also explored Victorian Government policy directions, transport and accessibility issues, demographic trends and the economic outlook relevant to activity centres.

Key findings of the Technical Report are:

- 1. Since the preparation of the 2006 Activity Centres Strategy, economic and social policy changes have occurred locally and beyond, including the introduction of zone reforms, Plan Melbourne metropolitan strategy, and changes to the State Planning Policy Framework. All have implications for activity centre planning.*
- 2. In Hobsons Bay, activity centres are important for their delivery of a range of retail, commercial, civic and other facilities and services to residents and visitors, and for economic activity and employment.*
- 3. Future planning should be based on a local network of activity centres.*
- 4. Significant population growth is expected to continue in Altona North, Spotswood/South Kingsville, Newport West and Williamstown. These areas will be increasingly important markets for centres such as Altona Gate (Altona North), Spotswood, Newport and Williamstown.*
- 5. Hobsons Bay residents spend nearly half of their retail spending outside the municipality. This is a high degree of escape spending and is above reasonable expectations for a metropolitan municipality.*
- 6. Retail floor-space is forecast to increase by between approximately 32 per cent and 45 per cent between 2014 and 2036 (currently 135,550 square meters). Commercial office space is forecast to increase by approximately 46 per cent over the same period (currently 19,060 square metres).*

These key findings, along with the consultation outcomes and current Victorian Government policy, provide the context upon which the strategy is framed.

Activity centre strategy principles

The following **principles** underpin this strategy:

- an activity centres network assists effective planning for future community needs
- accessible, vibrant and high quality centres support investment, business, development and employment
- investment in activity centre infrastructure and facilities supports local and surrounding communities
- in successful activity centres, higher density residential development respects local heritage and built form values

This strategy sets out a vision for activity centres in Hobsons Bay from which a series of whole of Council directions emerge. These directions and strategies are supported by general and activity centre specific strategies, policies and actions.



1.3. Activity centres in context

1.3.1. Types of activity centres

Plan Melbourne provides the following general description of activity centres:

Areas that provide a focus for services, employment, housing, transport and social interaction. They range in size and intensity of use from smaller neighbourhood centres to major suburban centres and larger metropolitan centres.

Activity centres vary significantly in terms of size, character and function.

Metropolitan Activity Centres

Plan Melbourne identifies nine existing and two future Metropolitan Activity Centres (Metro Centres); including nearby Footscray and Sunshine.

Metro Centres are to be the main focus for growth, especially in established urban areas, as they cater to the needs of a wider regional population and offer access to a broad range of goods and services. They will also be hubs for public transport services and play a major service delivery role, attracting broad investment in education, health and higher density housing.

While there are no Metro Centres in Hobsons Bay, it is important to recognise that nearby Footscray and Sunshine have a direct impact and influence on the municipality and the evolution of Hobsons Bay's Local Activity Centres Network.

⁹ DELWP, Plan Melbourne 2017-50 p.48.

¹⁰ DELWP, Plan Melbourne 2017 p. 139

Major and Neighbourhood Activity Centres

Plan Melbourne notes that:

While metropolitan activity centres will need to accommodate significant growth and infrastructure, they are supported by a network of major and neighbourhood activity centres of varying size, role and function. These can range in size and intensity of use from large shopping centres to small local strip-shopping centres.⁹

Accordingly, Plan Melbourne distinguishes between Metropolitan Activity Centres, Major Activity Centres and Neighbourhood Centres. Plan Melbourne describes Major Activity Centres and Neighbourhood Centres as follows:

Major Activity Centres

Major Activity Centres provide access to a wide range of goods and services. They have different attributes and provide different functions with some serving larger regional catchments.¹⁰

Neighbourhood Activity Centres

Neighbourhood Activity Centres are local centres that provide access to local goods, services and employment opportunities and serve the needs of the surrounding community.¹¹

¹¹ DELWP, Plan Melbourne 2017 p. 139

1.3.2. What makes a successful activity centre?

Plan Melbourne identifies three key ingredients which contribute to vibrant activity centres. These are as follows:

- well serviced transport options (including public transport)
- a wide mix of land uses
- a diversity of housing choice in a walkable area

Activity centres accommodate an increasingly wide range of uses in addition to traditional retail shopfronts, including commercial services, professional services, health care, community and cultural services, hospitality, entertainment, civic and open space.

Activity centres and the local economy and employment

Activity centres in Hobsons Bay are a major source of employment, investment and economic activity. They contribute to the provision of goods and services to residents and visitors and are a focus for interaction between individuals, businesses and the wider community. Importantly, activity centres shape perceptions about the wider locality and community in which they exist, meaning they play an important marketing role and help shape local economic confidence levels.

Activity centres are a provider of local employment opportunities. Sectors that tend to concentrate in activity centres are retail trade, accommodation and food services, government services and financial and insurance services. These sectors combined account for some 15 per cent or approximately one in seven jobs located in Hobsons Bay.

Accordingly, activity centres are an important part of the economy, both in terms of their direct contribution to employment and activity, and through indirect influences on a wide range of economic and social outcomes.

Activity centres and retailing

Retailing is the greatest generator of activity and visitation in most activity centres across Australia, typically accounting for over 50 per cent of businesses and over 75 per cent of shopfront floor-space.

Retail is a key determinant of how people use a centre and where people come from to visit that centre. Activity centres with a broad and successful range of retail traders will generate more visitation from a wider geographic area than activity centres with a non-retail commercial focus. The quality of an activity centre, therefore, will have implications for the success or otherwise of local retail outlets.

Activity centres and community wellbeing

As a focal point for civic and cultural institutions, health and support services and open space, activity centres encourage community wellbeing through structured and unstructured social interaction. Well designed, accessible and safe activity centres can provide opportunities for unstructured, ad hoc, passive recreation.

Activity centres are important for connecting people with community facilities and a range of services, and for connecting people with other people. They play an important role in creating a more cohesive and inclusive community.

Activity centres and housing

Activity centres are becoming increasingly important for new residential development. The ongoing decline in household sizes, changes in lifestyle and the community's strong desire to preserve the neighbourhood character of established residential areas means that activity centres will need to accommodate increasing demand for



diverse housing options through medium and higher-density apartment type living.

Thus, activity centres will comprise an increasing share of Hobsons Bay's additional housing supply, particularly through infill and mixed use development.

1.4. State and local planning policy context

1.4.1. State Context

State planning policy

State policy at Clause 11.03 *Activity Centres* applies to all planning schemes in Victoria. It emphasises the primacy of activity centres in managing growth and ensuring the positive future for current and future Victorians.

It has the objective:

To build up activity centres as a focus for high-quality development, activity and living for the whole community by developing a network of activity centres

Amongst other matters, it further encourages state and local government and their agencies to adopt the following strategies:

- *undertake strategic planning for the use and development of land in and around the activity centres*
- *give clear direction in relation to preferred locations for investment*
- *encourage a diversity of housing types at higher densities in and around activity centres*

- *reduce the number of private motorised trips by concentrating activities that generate high numbers of (non-freight) trips in highly accessible activity centres*
- *improve access by walking, cycling and public transport to services and facilities for local and regional populations*
- *broaden the mix of uses in activity centres to include a range of services over longer hours appropriate to the type of centre and needs of the population served*
- *provide a focus for business, shopping, working, leisure and community facilities*
- *encourage economic activity and business synergies*
- *locate significant new education, justice, community, administrative and health facilities that attract users from large geographic areas in or on the edge of Metropolitan Activity Centres or Major Activity Centres with good public transport*
- *locate new small scale education, health and community facilities that meet local needs in or next to Neighbourhood Activity Centres*
- *ensure Neighbourhood Activity Centres are located within convenient walking distance in the design of new subdivisions*
- *improve the social, economic and environmental performance and amenity of activity centres*

While these strategies are very broad, they show that preparation of an activity centres strategy is an important way of giving meaning to these policies at the local context.

Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria 2017

The *Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria 2017* were introduced by the Victorian Government in late 2017 to assist in creating places that are:

- *accessible, safe, diverse and provide choice*
- *enjoyable, engaging and comfortable to be in and move around*
- *conducive to people being more physically active*
- *accommodating of people of all abilities, ages and cultures*
- *distinctive and celebrate their social, cultural and natural heritage*

They provide important guidance for improving and developing liveable, attractive and functional public realm and are very relevant to activity centres.

They also help to demonstrate sound design responses to particular matters that are often encountered as Melbourne and other Victorian settlements grow. The guidelines provide best practice knowledge and advice and are structured around the following design elements:

1. urban structure
2. movement network
3. public spaces
4. public transport environs
5. buildings
6. objects in the public realm

These elements have been used to structure the centre-specific urban design directions set out in the centre-specific guidelines (Part 5).

The Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria 2017 are a reference document in all planning schemes through the State Planning Policy Framework. (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2017)

Better Apartment Design Standards for Victoria

Better Apartment Design Standards were introduced to all planning schemes in 2017. They are intended to improve apartment design throughout the state by mandating design of apartment buildings that more suitably respond to context and successfully incorporate higher development standards.

The Apartment Design Guidelines for Victoria 2017 were published to provide guidance on meeting and assessing the apartment design standards, and are structured around:

1. siting and building arrangement
2. building performance
3. dwelling amenity

Apartment buildings can make a significant contribution to the provision of housing in activity centres, as well as strongly influence the public realm in centres.

The Apartment Guidelines for Victoria 2017 complement the Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria 2017, and is also a reference document in all planning schemes through the State Planning Policy Framework. (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2017)

Plan Melbourne 2017-50

Plan Melbourne identifies nine existing and two future Metropolitan Activity Centres of particular strategic importance.

Within Hobsons Bay, three Major Activity Centres are identified - namely Altona (Altona Beach), Altona North (Altona Gate Shopping

Centre)¹² and Williamstown. Most remaining centres, although unnamed, are classified as Neighbourhood Activity Centres.

Plan Melbourne directs that Activity Centres will play an increasingly significant role in accommodating urban growth and development. It sets the following strategic directions for all activity centres:

All activity centres have the capacity to continue to grow and diversify the range of activities they offer. Opportunities to partner with the private sector to enable future diversification, investment and employment growth should be explored and, where appropriate, facilitated through planning provisions.

Diversification will give communities access to a wide range of goods and services, provide local employment and support local economies and the development of 20-minute neighbourhoods. In many activity centres, this growth will include housing, particularly at higher densities¹³.

The 20-minute neighbourhood

One of the key underpinning strategic directions of Plan Melbourne is the 20-minute neighbourhood, defined as ‘the ability to meet most everyday (non-work) needs locally, primarily within a 20-minute walk, cycle or local public transport trip of home’.¹⁴

Neighbourhood Activity Centres, specifically, are identified as fundamental to this concept:

Neighbourhood activity centres are an integral part of the city’s vibrant community life and critical to the creation of 20-minute

neighbourhoods. These high streets and specialised strips of shops, cafés, small supermarkets, service businesses, community services and public spaces serve the needs of the surrounding community and provide a focus not only for local jobs but also for social interaction and community participation¹⁵.

Plan Melbourne depicts the 20-minute neighbourhood in the following diagram.



Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Plan Melbourne states that neighbourhoods need to offer choice in housing so they can accommodate a more diverse population, create opportunities for local businesses and new jobs, and deliver better access to local services and facilities. It recognises that local government is best placed to understand and apply local solutions and will be

¹² Identified as Altona Gate (Altona North) Major Activity Centre in this strategy.

¹³ DELWP, Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, p.37

¹⁴ DELWP, Plan Melbourne 2017-2050 p.99

¹⁵ DELWP, Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, p.99

supported to prepare structure plans for their neighbourhood activity centres to help deliver 20-minute neighbourhoods.¹⁶

1.5. Local context

Local Planning Policy

Local activity centres are addressed in the *Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme* at Clause 21.02 and Clause 21.03.

Clause 21.02 identifies a broad land use framework for the municipality, showing the Major Activity Centres of Altona (Altona Beach), Altona Gate (Altona North) and Williamstown.

Clause 21.03 spatially sets out a wider network of activity centres in Hobsons Bay, and highlights local issues that affect how state policy is implemented, for example where heritage considerations influence growth and development in activity centres. The clause includes a number of objectives and strategies which can generally be summarised as follows:

- protect business uses from residential and industrial encroachment to maintain an appropriate mix of activity and support active frontages
- strengthen centres by discouraging out-of-centre retail investment and by investing in public art, cultural activities, signage and community facilities in the centres
- appropriately manage car parking and access in centres within the context of an integrated transport system (noting major centres have separate car parking policies)
- maintain and enhance Williamstown Activity Centre through protection of heritage places, support for tourism, links to other activities, and management of car parking
- maintain and enhance Altona Beach Activity Centre through developing a ‘sense of place’ and greater connections to the foreshore, broadening the mix of uses including residential and tourism uses, and improving visual amenity and access, as well as improving links to other related areas
- maintain and enhance Newport Activity Centre through a focus on culture and the arts, intensification of residential development, and improvements to visual amenity, access and connectivity
- improve the mix of uses at Central Square (Altona Meadows) to include community and health facilities and additional residential and retail uses
- improve the functionality and development of the Aviation Road Activity Centre to enhance integrated transport outcomes
- support coordinated and sustainable development of the former Cabot’s site on Millers Road and to protect the core industry from commercial encroachment.

¹⁶ DELWP, Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, p.101



Relevant Council strategies and plans

Other council strategies and plans relevant to local activity centre planning include:

- *Hobsons Bay 2030 Community Vision (2017)*
- *Council Plan 2017-21*
- *Hobsons Bay Housing Strategy (2019)*
- *Neighbourhood Character Study (2019)*
- *Hobsons Bay Heritage Study 2017 (as amended)*
- *Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme (as amended)*
- *Integrated Transport Plan, 2017*
- *Economic Development Strategy, 2015-20*
- *Hobsons Bay Open Space Strategy 2018*
- *Environmentally Sustainable Development Policy (expected 2018)*
- *Disability Access and Inclusion Strategy, 2013-17 (under review)*
- *Ageing Well Strategy 2007-17 (under review)*
- *Problem Gambling on Electronic Gaming Machines Policy, 2015*
- *Affordable Housing Policy Statement 2016*
- *Newport Vision: Activity Centre Structure Plan (expected 2019)*
- *Spotswood Structure Plan (expected 2019)*
- *Altona Beach Urban Design Framework 2008*
- *Laverton Together Urban Design Framework 2006*
- *Events and Festival Plan 2016-21*

1.6. Expected growth in Hobsons Bay

The resident population in Hobsons Bay is forecast to increase from an estimated 88,990 people in 2014, to 96,600 people by 2021, and 107,240 people by 2036¹⁷.

This growth is an overall increase of 18,250 people over the 22 year period, or an average of 830 people each year. These forecasts are broadly comparable to those released by the State Government (Victoria in Future, 2014) which estimated the municipality's population would increase by approximately 21,910 residents by 2036.

It is expected that along with suitable Strategic Redevelopment Areas, activity centres will accommodate the majority of growth/infill development over the period to 2036. It is important to understand the nature and location of anticipated growth and development pressure so as to effectively inform activity centre planning and prioritisation of works.

The Hobsons Bay Activity Centres Strategy: Technical Report 2016 examines anticipated population growth in four precincts across Hobsons Bay:

- north precinct
- south-east precinct
- central precinct
- west precinct

Please see Appendix A for the forecast change in each of these precincts as described in the 2016 technical report.

¹⁷ Source: Activity Centre Strategy Technical Report (December 2016). An addendum prepared to the Hobsons Bay Housing Strategy Background Report (updated 2017)

considered 2016 census data and found key demographic growth and trends in the municipality remain unchanged.

The Hobsons Bay Housing Strategy 2019 seeks, among other things, to identify the locations in which the additional population could and should be accommodated over the next twenty years.

As part of the Housing Strategy, a housing capacity assessment was undertaken¹⁸ which included a rating of key activity centres where there has been/is expected to be increased pressure for new residential development.

The rating was based on six criteria, or attributes, namely:

- access to public transport
- levels of services and retailing
- access to key institutions
- urban integration¹⁹
- proximity to foreshore/waterways
- residential development opportunity²⁰

Explanation about the six criteria can be found in the Housing Strategy²¹, while Section 2.2.2 of this strategy shows how each location rates against each criterion. Broadly, the extent to which the centres perform across the attributes can be seen below, in order from highest to lowest:

- Altona Beach (Altona)
- Williamstown (Douglas Parade and Ferguson Street)
- Laverton Village and Aviation Road, Laverton; Newport
- Williamstown (Nelson Place); Harrington Square, Altona
- Spotswood; Rifle Range and Williamstown North
- Borrack Square, Altona North; Central Square, Altona Meadows
- Altona Gate (Altona North); Somers Parade, Altona

¹⁸ By .id Consultants (updated 2019).

¹⁹ I.e. ease of movement through the centre

²⁰ Refers to the expected densities/propensity to housing change pending the implementation of the New Residential Zones.

- Challis Street, Newport; The Circle, Altona North; Vernon Street, South Kingsville

The Hobsons Bay Housing Strategy 2019 also identifies three 'Housing Change Areas' to manage future housing growth and guide the application of the new residential zones which were introduced by the Victorian Government in 2013 and further reformed in 2017. The housing change areas are:

- Limited Change Area
- Moderate Change Area
- Substantial Change Area

The Housing Strategy 2019 notes that any future structure plans/urban design frameworks for certain activity centres may alter the boundaries of the housing change areas.

²¹ *Housing Strategy Volume Two: Housing Framework Plan and Housing Capacity Assessment* (2019)