

2 background and context

2.1 the place

Ringwood East is designated a Neighbourhood Activity Centre (NAC) within the City of Maroondah, playing a local service role, characterised by a dominance of small businesses and shops, providing for local convenience shopping needs. The Ringwood East NAC is one of eight Neighbourhood Activity Centres located within the City of Maroondah and is located approximately 24kms east of the Melbourne CBD, in the south-west of the Maroondah municipality.

The land in question comprises approximately 600,000m² of land, with the study area's boundary defined by Mount Dandenong Road and Eastfield Road to the north, Federal Road and Illoura Avenue to the west and Knaith Road and Tween Street to the south. To the east the study area is defined by Short Street and the rear boundaries of properties on the east side of Victoria Street. The study area represents an approximate radius of 400m access to the Ringwood East station taking into account some major physical barriers such as Mount Dandenong Road and Eastfield Road. To the north east (approx. 120m) is the Maroondah Hospital, to immediate the north-west is the East Ringwood Reserve and to the west (approx. 400m) is Ringwood Lake.

The study area is characterised by an important north-south road, Dublin Road, which runs through the centre and the intersecting east-west railway line. These key movement corridors segment the study area into two clear parcels north and south of the railway line, with Dublin Road dividing these parcels further still. Ringwood East railway station is located in the centre of the study area, with the commercial shopping strip running adjacent to the railway line immediately south of the station.

This strip runs along only the south side of Railway Avenue between Dublin Road and Lois Street, with commuter car parking provided along the north side of Railway Avenue, separating the commercial strip from the railway line. One of the key characteristics of both the commercial strip (due to the heavily vegetated railway corridor) and the surrounding residential hinterland is the sense of 'green' created by an extensive canopy tree cover.



Adjoining the central station and commercial area are two clusters of community services and infrastructure. To the west of Dublin Road is the 2 hectare Australian Defence Force site – which is the largest land holding in the study area. These community, civic and commercial uses are surrounded by a diverse range of residential uses.

As it stands, the study area contains the mix of land uses and types of services and facilities encouraged in Neighbourhood Activity Centres. The residential areas to the south of the rail line provide for primarily detached dwellings and present a strong landscaped neighbourhood character, while the northern residential areas (particularly between Bona Street and Dublin Road) are characterised by more consolidated development in the form of villa units.

The Ringwood East NAC has a pleasant 'urban village' feel with a consistent, if slightly dated, public realm treatment, and a strong 50s character to the commercial building stock, including a number of shop frontages with angled front elevations to Railway Avenue. Development has tended not to exceed 2 storeys to date and the wide, north facing pedestrian pavement provides a solid base for this Plan to build upon.

2.2 the people

Ringwood East has a diverse mix of residents ranging from young families to older residents, as well as a number of newly arrived migrants. Background research identified the following key matters:

- In 2011, Ringwood East had an estimated population of 9,887 people. Within the next 20 years the area is expected to absorb an additional 923 people, equating to an estimated population of 10,810 people by 2031.
- 19.8% of the population was aged between 0 and 17 and 24.1% were aged 60 years and over.
- The largest increase in housing types is forecast to be in couples without dependents and lone person households will also increase to 26.9% of all households.



The above figures mean there is likely to be a need for around 500 new dwellings for the wider Ringwood East area, most of which would be expected to be provided in the form of medium density development within the study area due to the relatively established nature of the rest of the suburb.

There are also a range of highly active community groups which use the Ringwood East activity centre including the Ringwood East Scouts, the Elderly Citizens, Mothers Groups Transition Towns Maroondah and the local Red Cross among many others. This broad and active range of community groups need to be supported through any Structure Plan for the area.

2.3 the policy

A Structure Plan seeks to influence land use, transport networks and development and this is guided primarily by a State Planning Policy Framework and a Local Planning Policy Framework. The Local framework must support the State framework and cannot contradict it.

The most important piece of policy for the Ringwood East NAC is 'activity centre' policy. Activity Centres are defined within State Planning Policy as being areas which provide a variety of land uses and are highly accessible to the community, supporting a concentration of retail, residential, commercial, administrative, entertainment and cultural developments. Planning for these areas needs to encourage a diversity of housing types at higher densities in and around activity centres, reduce the number of private motorised trips, encourage physical activity, healthier lifestyles and broaden the mix of uses. State policy also refers to *Melbourne 2030* which defines a hierarchy of centres and outlines in more detail the roles of the different types of centres. Maroondah's Local policy defines Ringwood East as being a Neighbourhood Activity Centre. Expectations around Neighbourhood Activity Centres are as follows:

- Neighbourhood Activity Centres are dominated by small businesses and shops. They offer some local convenience services and at least some public transport. Their key features are:*
- generally, a limited mix of uses meeting local convenience needs.



- generally less than 10,000 square metres of retail floor space.
- accessible to a viable user population by walking/cycling.
- accessibility by local bus services, and public transport links to one or more Principal or Major Activity Centres.
- their role as important community focal points, ideally close to schools, libraries, child care, health services, police stations and other facilities that benefit from good public transport.
- from a metropolitan perspective, these centres contribute to the goal of encouraging walking, cycling and local public transport use, particularly where they are part of a network of centres. Redevelopment in middle and outer suburbs and development of new growth areas should provide viable locations for Neighbourhood Activity Centres in areas where their current distribution is inadequate. Their location should be planned in conjunction with the design of local public transport services.
- higher-density housing will be encouraged in and around Neighbourhood Activity Centres. It should be designed to fit the context and enhance the character of the area while providing a variety of housing options for different types of households. Development of these centres can improve access to local services and accommodate the changing housing needs of those who do not want to break their links with their local community.

This State level policy is weighed up against any Local policy when there is a difference of opinion on planning matters and as such, it is important that this Structure Plan provides a balanced outcome.

Other relevant policy includes a recognition of the importance of distinct local identities through acknowledgement of different neighbourhood characters in both State and Local policy and a statutory protection extended under local policy for canopy vegetation within the City of Maroondah. The creation of high quality public spaces, cycle and pedestrian linkages and more intensive residential development where high quality public transport exists are other common themes between State and Local policy affecting the Ringwood East NAC.



2.4 the project

The Ringwood East Structure Plan has consisted of four main stages:

- Stage 1: project inception (getting the project started)
- Stage 2: background (learning more about the place)
- Stage 3: formulation of structure plan (generating the vision for each centre)
- Stage 4: project delivery (executing the plan)

consultation

Meaningful engagement of the community has been a key focus of this project. A series of events have been held to ensure that the community had the opportunity not only to identify issues that currently affect the centre but to actively participate in the generation of the future direction for the centre. The following is a summary of the main consultation events undertaken and the feedback received from the community.

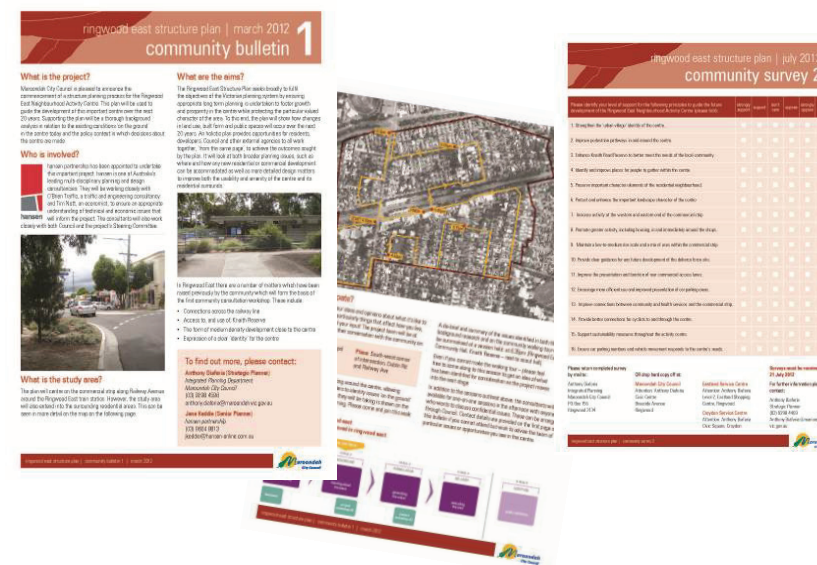
background

As part of the project's background stage, the first phase of stakeholder and community consultation was undertaken to find out more about the place and identify the key issues. This included meetings with Council officers and relevant authorities, targeted sessions with key stakeholders, a survey distributed to all residents within the study area and a **'walking workshop'** with the broader community. This 'walking workshop' involved the consultant team being taken around the centre by members of the community in order to gain an understanding of issues 'on-the-ground'.

The following is a summary of the feedback received during the background stage. These comments provide a record of feedback that was received from the broader community which, in conjunction with feedback reviewed from other key stakeholder groups and the project Steering Committee, informed the underlying 'vision' for the Structure Plan.

- Car parking areas in the centre should be improved, they are often unattractive and unappealing.
- Car parking with in Knaiht Road Reserve is dangerously uncoordinated.

- Knaiht Road Reserve is a potentially wonderful community asset that suffers from a lack of awareness, a lack of co-ordinated development and poor facilities, and the community is very passionate about its enhancement.
- Consolidation of the buildings in Knaiht Road Reserve to make it more open and accessible is important.
- The community needs gathering spaces, 'village green' or urban plazas to support the existing strong community networks.
- High amenity opportunities for passive recreation are lacking in the centre.
- The future of the Australian Defence Force site could significantly impact on the character of the centre and the community wants certainty about what development might occur there.
- Patterson Street can be a dangerous place for pedestrians.
- There is a lot of movement between EACH community facilities and the Maroondah Hospital which is not currently recognised.
- There needs to be a pedestrian crossing opportunity at Dublin and Knaiht Roads.
- The access way to the rear of the commercial strip is dangerous – broken concrete is hazardous, vehicles are driving illegally down one-way sections which is a conflict with pedestrians and there is limited active and passive surveillance.
- Connection to Ringwood Lake is unclear and there is no way-finding signage.
- Footpath lacking in the centre – some streets have none – this is a hindrance for parents with prams and the elderly with walking frames.
- Bike paths should link to Ringwood Lake, Croydon and other key destinations.
- Major demographic is the elderly so need to provide a mix of housing so that the elderly are catered for.
- Need to ensure retention of trees and ensure that building envelopes are set back to maintain generous landscaping.
- In areas in close proximity to the station there is a need to look at development of taller forms with no car parking which is surrounded by landscaping and open space rather than providing low scale units with garages and concrete driveways.
- An existing modernist house on Dublin Road is a highlight in the area.



- Drainage along Patterson Street is an issue since the station car park has been sealed.
- There are no facilities in the centre for young adults.
- The commercial strip is designed to get in and get out – there is nowhere to stay or meet up with people.
- There is nowhere to lock bikes in the street around the commercial strip and very poor cycle connections to the centre.
- There is opportunity for infill development at the rear of the commercial strip.
- Signage is needed at Dublin Road to establish an identity and presentation to the commercial centre.
- Better access to and beautification of the station is required.

The following provides a summary of the feedback received through the community survey, which was distributed during this stage.

- The vast majority of respondents identified cafes, restaurants, quality take-away stores and tapas/ wine bars as a major gap in the provision of services within the centre.
- This was followed by community spaces, with a smaller but still significant number of respondents seeking specialist retail services, banks, fishmongers, quality delis and a local hardware store.
- There was a relatively even spread in the type of housing development respondents would like to see in the centre. The majority would like to see housing developed above the shops and more 'mixed use' and townhouse style development.
- In addition, a large number of respondents sought to see an increase in aged care and retirement living.
- Interestingly, a comparable number identified a desire to see additional apartment development within the centre as identified that development should remain as single dwellings with large yards.
- There was a fairly even spread of where people would like to see development occur within the centre.
- Landscaping and the planting of trees was by far the most important design element identified. This was followed by setbacks from the street.



- While there was a fair spread of responses the other matters which were of most interest to respondents were the setbacks from neighbouring properties and building bulk and size.
- The quiet 'village' feel, trees and other landscape elements were by far the most valued aspects of the activity centre.
- The safety and amenity of pedestrians and, in particular, across and around the rail line and to community facilities was the key challenge identified by the majority of respondents.
- Most respondents felt that changes, such as the new landscaping, which had occurred in the centre over the last 5 years had been positive.

There were also a number of valuable suggestions which were made as part of the survey responses which were reviewed and replicated in full in the Discussion Paper which underpinned this Plan.

visioning

Following on from the background stage of this project, a series of 'principles' which are documented in the following chapter were circulated widely through the Ringwood East community via a direct mail-out of a survey seeking to gauge the level of support for the 16 principles. In response to the survey the following is noted:

- Feedback was overwhelmingly supportive.
- Most support was for protection of character and links.
- Least support for increased housing and activity.

The team then held a series of '**scrapbooking**' workshops where the community was asked to come and provide photos, articles, examples from other places and ideas for how they would like to see the principles implemented. The response from the community was significant and some of the material they provided is shown below.

The project team then worked hard to investigate how this multitude of ideas might be 'quilted' or 'knitted' together into a coherent whole. The first iteration of the key ambitions detailed in the following section was generated as part of these working sessions and a presentation back to the community the following night of how the team had pulled together the community's ideas was held.



Some of the other ideas generated by the community as part of this process, which have not been integrated into this document, include:

- Increasing interaction between the elderly citizens, scouts and child care groups to foster intergenerational learning.
- To paint lines for ball sports on underutilised car parking areas for local kids to use of weekends when commuter demand is less.
- Promoting more 'European' style medium density development, with perimeter buildings and shared internal courtyards so kids can play safely.
- Ensuring the Knaith Road playground is tailored for 'all abilities'.
- Installation of a sound shell in Knaith Road reserve.
- Planting of edible fruit trees and other plants throughout the centre.
- Designation of a 'café zone' within the centre.
- Using gravel rather than concrete paths to maintain an 'informal' feel but create somewhere for older people to feel safe walking / riding their scooters.

