



**Darebin  
Economic  
Framework**

*Where business thrives  
and local prosperity stays  
in the Darebin community.*



Darebin City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waters we now call Darebin and affirms that the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people have lived on this land for millennia, practicing their customs and ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. Council acknowledges that Elders past, present and emerging are central to the cohesion, intergenerational wellbeing and ongoing self-determination of Aboriginal communities. They have played and continue to play a pivotal role in maintaining and transmitting culture, history and language.





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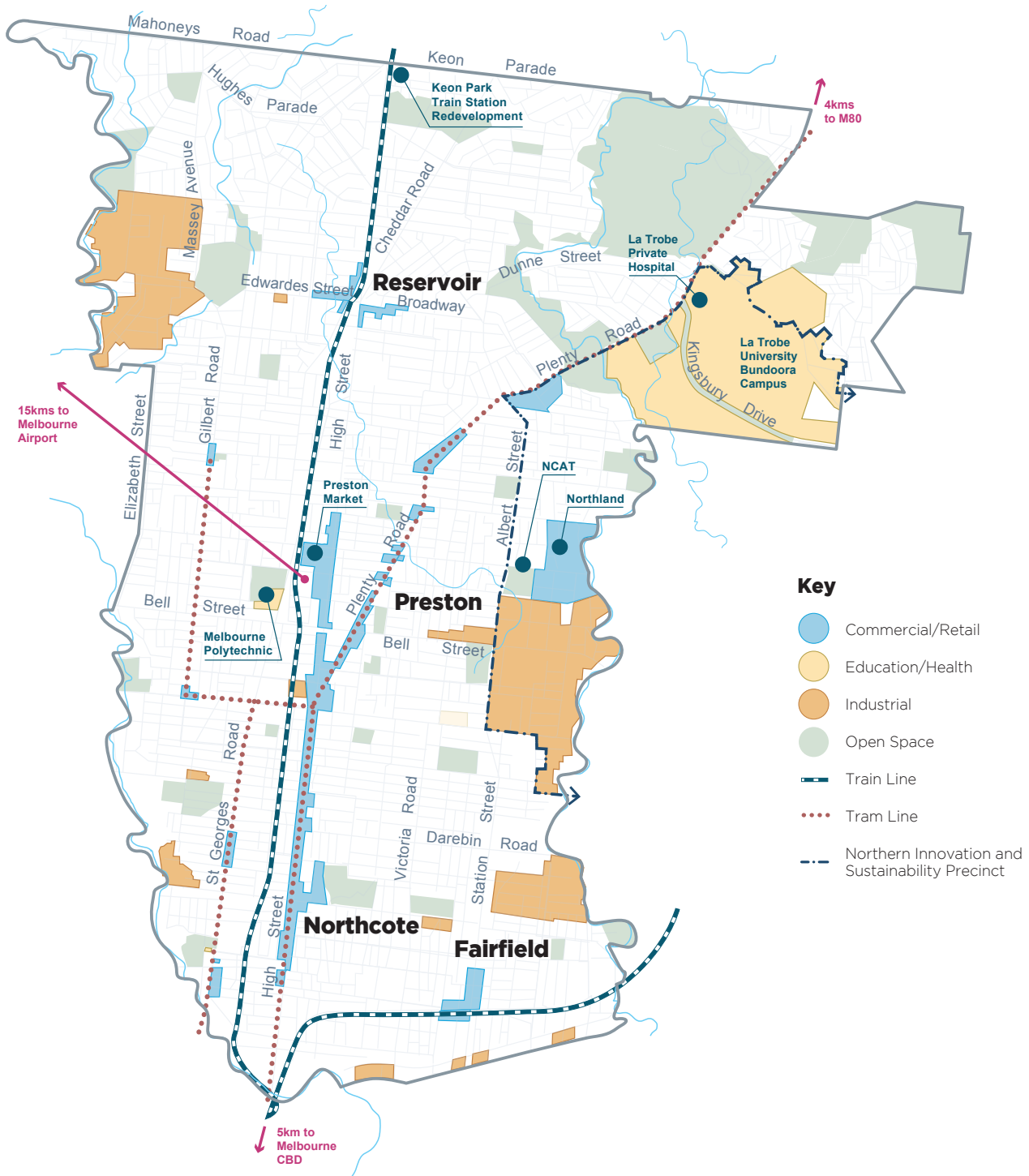
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# Introduction

## Purpose of the Framework

At Darebin, we understand how economic, environmental, and social drivers both enable and constrain economic growth and job creation within our community. The current cost of living pressures have highlighted the need for adaptable and resilient economic strategies.

Our Economic Framework provides a guide for how Council works with its businesses, industry, and partners to build a cohesive and clear economic direction for Darebin. It aims to leverage Darebin's strengths, such as its vibrant arts and media sector, strong educational institutions, and diverse workforce, to grow health, job opportunities, and overall prosperity.



## Research and consultation approach

A thorough and comprehensive research and consultation approach was undertaken to develop this Economic Framework. Between October 2023 and July 2024, a series of consultations with local businesses and economic stakeholders were conducted. This involved engaging with 327 businesses and stakeholders through round tables, summits, and workshops, resulting in 961 individual comments and 1162 votes on those comments.

The consultation process also included 405 minutes of guest presentations, 450 minutes of networking, and 750 minutes of group discussion, covering 14 different industries. To ensure the framework is grounded in best practices and evidence-based development, an extensive review of case studies was conducted.

This review identified successful strategies and innovative approaches, providing valuable insights and benchmarks for Darebin.

Local knowledge and experience were carefully examined alongside these case studies to tailor the framework to Darebin's unique context. Data analysis played a crucial role in shaping the framework. Statistical data was analysed to identify trends, opportunities, and challenges within the Darebin economy.

This evidence-based approach ensures that the framework is not only responsive to current economic conditions but also strategically positioned to anticipate and address future changes. The integration of robust data analysis underscores the importance of making informed decisions and crafting economic development plans that are backed by evidence, enhancing the framework's effectiveness and relevance. The commitment to a rigorous, data-driven development process reflects the Council's dedication to ensuring a resilient and prosperous economic environment in Darebin.



## Engagement contributions



**327**

businesses and stakeholders came to a round table, summit or workshop



**961**

individual comments gathered



**1,162**

votes were cast on comments



**405**

minutes of guest presentations



**450**

minutes of networking



**750**

minutes of group discussion



**14**

industries represented



**109**

people completed a business survey



**26**

people completed a community survey



**8**

departments of Council were engaged



**Why Darebin?**  
A diverse,  
multicultural  
community  
passionate about  
great food!





**Why Darebin?**

A business community that prioritises hiring locals.

## Role of Council in economic development

Local government operates in a complex economic environment. We serve as both major employers and catalysts for job creation within our communities.

As significant consumers and purchasers of goods and services, we also play a vital role in stimulating local economies.

However, our ability to influence broader economic outcomes is often constrained by external factors and Council's key revenue base is rate capped.

Our Framework therefore positions Council in differing roles depending upon local economic needs and resource capability.

<b>Council's role</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Advocate</b>	Advocate for our business and wider community on economic reform, including industry, business, place, sustainability, and social issues.
<b>Capacity builder</b>	Facilitate and support businesses, employers, and employees with capacity-building training.
<b>Communicator</b>	Share knowledge and information to improve economic, business, and place outcomes and partnerships.
<b>Connector</b>	Connect Darebin's communities together and to the wider regions to drive and strengthen partnerships and investment.
<b>Action leader</b>	Make impactful and/or sustainable change by successfully delivering on agreed actions in an efficient manner.
<b>Partner</b>	Work in collaboration with internal and external partners to provide value to each other and strategic outcomes for Darebin.
<b>Placemaker</b>	Enhance the physical and social fabric of our community spaces to foster thriving business environments and retail precincts.
<b>Planner</b>	Strategically plan to optimize land-use to support industry, business growth, and employment, and encourage business size diversification.
<b>Regulator</b>	Support and work with business to attract and efficiently process regulatory applications and solve compliance issues.
<b>Referrer</b>	Direct businesses to appropriate stakeholders and levels of government for information, grants, and support to help their business grow.

## Place led approach

By adopting a place-led approach, we ensure that economic development strategies are tailored to the specific needs and strengths of each community within Darebin. This involves close collaboration with local businesses, residents, and other stakeholders to create vibrant, resilient, and prosperous neighbourhoods. Council acts as a vital referrer, guiding businesses to relevant stakeholders and higher levels of government for additional resources and support, to enhance their growth and sustainability.

## Economic development within a climate emergency

Darebin City Council was the first government in the world to declare a Climate Emergency in response to community calls in 2016. Local businesses play a crucial role in addressing climate change as they are responsible for around half of our greenhouse gas emissions and are also highly vulnerable to its impacts. However, disruption brings opportunity. Darebin offers significant growth prospects for businesses in clean tech and sustainable food tech, which can leverage the local community's passion, expertise, and commitment to climate action. The transition to a circular economy presents numerous opportunities and benefits, including lower operating costs, enhanced resilience, and new avenues for growth in electrification and sustainability.

Our Economic Framework highlights these opportunities and encourages businesses that prioritise social and environmental responsibility to establish themselves in Darebin. By fostering a supportive environment for clean tech and sustainable food tech, we aim to attract businesses that align with our community values and contribute to a sustainable future. This strategic focus on climate adaptation and the green economy ensures that Darebin not only addresses the challenges of climate change but also capitalises on the economic benefits of becoming a hub for sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship.





**Why Darebin?**  
It's home to a dynamic social enterprise sector.

# Darebin's economic profile

Darebin's economic landscape is anchored by its resilient manufacturing sector, despite national trends, remaining a major export earner and provider of local jobs. The health and social assistance sectors are trending for significant growth, supported by major educational providers like La Trobe University and Melbourne Polytechnic, who supply skilled professionals to meet increasing industry demands. Darebin is becoming a hub for green technology and sustainable practices, attracting businesses committed to environmental sustainability. We have a diverse, multicultural and creative community that contributes a wide array of skills and innovative ideas, to make for a dynamic business environment.

## Local business summary



**155,683**

Population

[Economic profile | Darebin | economy.id](#)



**\$8.44**

**Billion** Gross Regional Product

[Economic profile | Darebin | economy.id](#)



**13,773**

Locally registered businesses



**98%**

Small businesses (<\$10 million turnover, **70%** micro/sole trader)



**17**

Businesses with **200+** employees



**250**

Businesses with a turnover over **\$10 million**



**61,681**

Local jobs

[Economic profile | Darebin | economy.id](#)

## Top 3 employing industries



**2,178**

Construction (**30%** with 1-4 employees)



**1,939**

Professional, scientific and technical (**92%** with 1-4 employees)



**1,420**

Rental, real estate and hiring

## Youth employment



**12.8%**

Youth unemployment

Source: SGS Economics and Planning (2024) using data from ABS Census 2016 and 2021 – Place of work data.

## Comparative advantage by industry

### Expanding sectors with a traditional strength (Top 3)

-  **1** Education and Training
-  **2** Retail Trade
-  **3** Healthcare and Social Assistance

### Emerging sectors (Top 3)

-  **1** Construction
-  **2** Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
-  **3** Transport, Postal and Warehousing

### Declining Industries with a traditional strength

-  **1** Manufacturing

### Declining industries without comparative advantage (Top 3)

-  **1** Financial and Insurance Services
-  **2** Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
-  **3** Wholesale Trade

Source: SGS Economics and Planning (2024) using data from ABS Census 2016 and 2021 - Place of work data.

While manufacturing has declined in Darebin, it still plays a vital role in the Darebin economy. Manufacturing is Darebin's largest export earner and remains a key industry of employment. Health and social assistance are projected to show the greatest growth over the next decade.

## Local economic drivers

### Top 5 resident local expenditure categories in Darebin (April 2024)

-  **1** Grocery Stores and Supermarkets  
\$21,659,477
-  **2** Dining and Entertainment  
\$19,482,679
-  **3** Specialised Food Retailing  
\$11,677,610
-  **4** Specialised and Luxury Goods  
\$10,374,824
-  **5** Transport  
\$9,670,532

### Top exports from the Darebin Economy, 2022/23

-  **1** Manufacturing  
\$858,600,000
-  **2** Education and Training  
\$675,800,000
-  **3** Healthcare and Social Assistance  
\$378,600,000
-  **4** Wholesale Trade  
\$304,400,000
-  **5** Retail Trade  
\$282,900,000

Source: SGS Economics and Planning (2024) using Spendmap data by Geografia.  
Note: Only top 5 spending categories are included.

# Economic vision for the future

## ‘Where business thrives and local prosperity stays in the Darebin community.’

Darebin is an economy where local independent business prospers, providing a catalyst for job growth within our community. An interconnected and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem is perfectly positioned for growth, enhancing the livelihoods of our residents and reinforcing the local economy.

Strengthened supply chains ensure the benefits of our economic progress – wealth, jobs, and talent – remain within Darebin, helping more residents live out their career dreams without the commute.

Darebin’s sustainability commitments are nationally recognised with our manufacturing sector leading transition towards a net-zero, climate-resilient economy. Our reputation as a sustainable and innovative business hub continues to attract investments in circular economy initiatives.

People feel connected, welcomed and proud to call Darebin their home. Darebin’s thriving main streets are celebrated as among the ‘coolest High Streets’ globally. Vibrant street culture, live music, art and unique Darebin ‘vibe’ are an integral part of local identity. Cultural dining destinations, markets and community events draw visitors back time and again.

The Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct is an economic powerhouse driving education, health and research innovation. La Trobe University is a thriving city of the future, driving advancement in education, health, and research while connecting communities within a vibrant urban precinct. La Trobe Private Hospital is surrounded by a thriving cluster of health professionals and entrepreneurs. Local talent and supply chains have bolstered Darebin’s health and education sector and reinforcing our vision of a thriving, job-rich local economy.



**Why Darebin?**  
A community  
that supports  
local independent  
business.

# Framework pillars

**Empowering small businesses for sustainable growth**

**Collaborative mainstreet revitalisation**



**Mobilising health and education for community wealth**

**Activating enterprise clusters for growth**



**Why Darebin?**

The dining destinations are outstanding!

*Local residents strongly support independent businesses, many of which choose to expand within Darebin.*



# Empowering small businesses for sustainable growth



## Strategic goal

Enable partnerships that support business of all scales for sustainable growth and workforce equity.

### Strengths

- A strong small business sector.
- A professionally oriented workforce.
- A diverse, multicultural community.
- Sustainability values including the Net-Zero Business Program and Climate Emergency Plan.

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
<b>Business sector is under pressure. They feel increasingly isolated and are seeking connection with local supply chains.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a Darebin Business Network to:</li> </ul>	Action leader	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect business for peer-to-peer support and localise supply chains</li> </ul>	Connector	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote industry champions / achievements and grant opportunities provided by third parties</li> </ul>	Communicator	# Participants % Growth business connection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate business peer-to-peer mentoring to help small business to learn, grow and scale</li> </ul>	Connector	# Businesses # Industries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partner with local providers to provide and assistance to small businesses and entrepreneurs – e.g. start-up support, business planning</li> </ul>	Partner	# Partnerships secured
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Celebrate local climate and circular economy business champions to foster peer to peer inspiration and learning.</li> </ul>	Communicator	



Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
<p><b>98% of business is small and approx. 65% are micro/sole traders. Most are working from home and they have low resilience.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with local co-working hubs to develop special offers for network members</li> </ul>	Partner	<p># Participants # Businesses</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore potential of utilising Council assets to support business meeting spaces and shared work-spaces</li> </ul>	Action leader	
<p><b>Only 17 businesses have more than 200 employees.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish relationships with big employers, health and higher education to explore interest in Anchor Network</li> </ul>	Connector	<p># Partnerships secured</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with Anchor Network to plan for local workforce development and job pathways for youth, CALD, First Nations and disability to build an equitable workforce of the future</li> </ul>	Partner	

# Collaborative mainstreet revitalisation



## Strategic goal

Collaborate for social and economic revitalisation and grow local stewardship.

### Strengths

- A network of distinct retail and commercial centres and strips.
- Places and destinations for visitors such as High Street, Northcote. Preston market. Northland as key retail hub for inner north-west.

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
<b>Consumer and business confidence trending down. Activity centre customers not local, only 15-20% of visitors are from Darebin.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboratively develop shared place visions that amplify unique strengths, activate local communities and drive social and economic revitalisation</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Participants % Social connection (met someone new)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revive shop local campaigns to increase local visitation and reduce economic leakage</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Business partnerships # Landlord partnerships
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop annual pace measurement framework and place satisfactions survey to track impact of initiatives</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Annual report and place satisfaction survey
<b>Online spend still a challenge to bricks and mortar. Foot traffic declining.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower local communities and grow locally-led activation skills and culture</li> </ul>	Capacity builder	# Participants # Businesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide placemaking and activation grants</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Grant funded projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish regular local activation calendar</li> </ul>	Action leader	% Local pride
<b>Youth unemployment high - 12.8%.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with youth service providers and others to establish youth placemaking champions network</li> </ul>	Partner Capacity builder	# Participants # Partnerships secured



**Why Darebin?**  
Preston is central.  
Our work is all  
over Melbourne.



# Mobilising health and education for community wealth



## Strategic goal

Mobilise partnerships, clusters and localised supply chains to grow community wealth.

### Strengths

- A growing health and education sector.
- Designated Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct in Bundoora.
- A highly skilled and multilingual population and workforce.
- A range of key anchor institutions - Latrobe University, Latrobe Hospital, Melbourne Polytechnic.

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
Darebin's key growth industries not well supported by allied clusters of local supply chains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, promote and grow local allied clusters to strengthen localised supply chains in proximity with health providers</li> </ul>	Action leader	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of allied health network groups to strengthen localised supply chains</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Participants % Business connection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grow relationships and formalise partnerships with hospitals, education and other big business to solve systemic problems and grow employment and wellbeing for youth and vulnerable communities</li> </ul>	Partner	# Business partnerships
Only 22% of Darebin residents work in Darebin. Local employees with specialised skills are hard to find, especially in the north.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with strategic partners to submit funding application on the Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct</li> </ul>	Partner	# Partners
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support better transport connection between education providers, health providers and other major employers</li> </ul>	Partner	\$ Funding # Grant funded projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract talent and skilled workforce within the Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct</li> </ul>	Partner	

# Activating enterprise clusters for growth



## Strategic goal

Activate clusters, support transition and plan for optimised land use for long term prosperity.

### Strengths

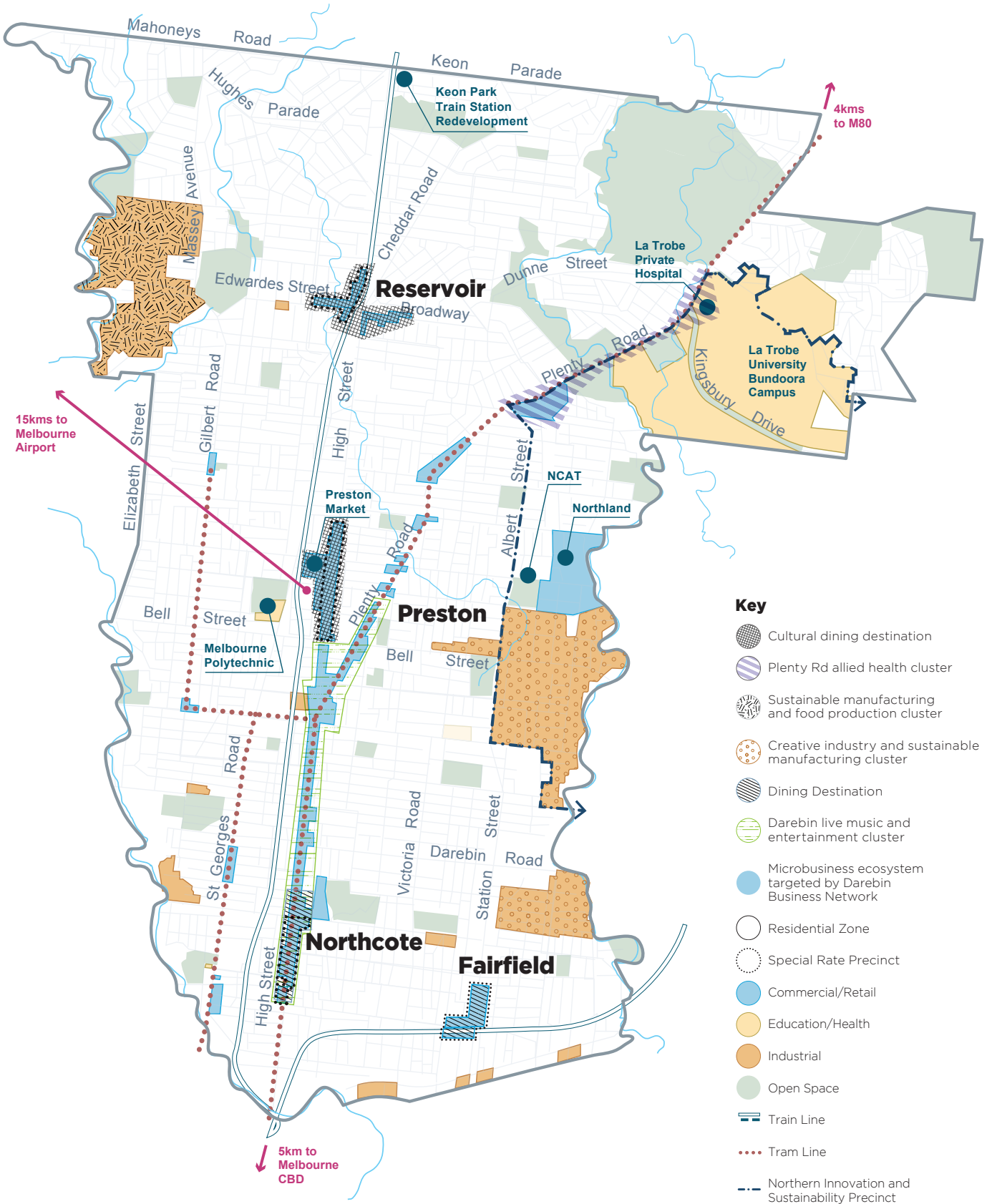
- A strong and resilient manufacturing sector.
- Large areas of industrial land.
- High value manufacturing activities.
- A highly educated local workforce.

Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
<b>Declining manufacturing industry is transitioning and considering moving out of town where lot sizes are bigger.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, promote and grow sustainable manufacturing zones to strengthen existing and Reza attract new business and investment</li> </ul>	Action leader	# New businesses # Business participants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with a third party to support small and medium scale business to be climate resilient and plan well managed risks associated with business transition to a net-zero economy</li> </ul>	Partner	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with the growing creative manufacturing sector in Preston and Thornbury and link to local startups and social enterprise</li> </ul>	Connector	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for funding to support increased training opportunities, including free TAFE programs and workforce training, for local residents to take up job opportunities in the zero-carbon economy.</li> </ul>	Advocate	



Problems	Solutions	Council's role	Measures
<b>Land use not optimised for local employment.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake an employment lands planning study to inform land use planning settings which respond to the strategic strengths, support economic development and long terms employment growth</li> </ul>	Action leader	Measures to be defined
<b>Emergent enterprise clusters undefined. Darebin's unique identity and strengths under-capitalised on and opportunities are lost.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify, promote and grow Darebin's iconic live music cluster to strengthen ecosystem and attract new business and investment</li> </ul>	Action leader	# Partners \$ Funding # Grant funded projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with business associations to promote and grow Darebin's iconic dining destinations to attract visitation and new business investment</li> </ul>	Partner	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attracting last mile distribution, food a beverage and other large employers to Darebin</li> </ul>	Advocate	

# Economic opportunity



## Lighthouse projects

### Empowering small businesses for sustainable growth



Partner with local businesses to establish a Darebin Business Network that supports networking, enables small business to participate in economic partnerships and scale

Maximise the utility of collaborative workspaces for small business by integrating and optimising local resources including Co-working spaces and Council Assets

Explore establish of a Small & Large Business Network to facilitate partnerships with big Darebin employers

Research feasibility of a B2B program for small businesses to apply for vouchers to be used with local businesses from a list of preferred Darebin business suppliers

### Collaborative mainstreet revitalisation



Develop Shared Place Visions to guide collaborative social & economic revitalisation and reconnect with local customers in activity centres

Review and revitalise Darebin's award-winning Active Spaces program to proactively address shopfront vacancy increase

Advocate for extension of Special Rates precinct boundaries in Reservoir

Developing locally-led place activation skills, with local communities and youth, and provide placemaking grants to empower locally-led activation ecosystem

### Mobilising health and education for community wealth



Define the Plenty Road allied health cluster around Latrobe Hospital, develop vision and investment attraction prospectus

Grow citywide local allied health and care networks to wellbeing growth supply chains

Northern Innovation & Sustainability Precinct (NISP) funding submission with La Trobe University, Banyule Council & NorthLink to drive social, economic and sustainability outcomes in the North

### Activating enterprise clusters for growth



Municipal Economic Land Use Study to understand the future needs and opportunities to optimise land use for job creation

Partner with third party to undertake a Net-Zero Business Program to support small and medium scale business to transition to a net-zero economy

Identify, define and promote existing informal clusters:

- Sustainable manufacturing & food production clusters in Reservoir Industrial Precinct
- Live music cluster in Thornbury and Croxton

Develop a Circular Economy & Creative Industry Investment Attract Strategy to develop new vision to revitalise Preston and Thornbury industrial precinct



**Why Darebin?**  
There's support for  
creating change in  
the community.



# The lifecycle of the Framework

This Framework is intended to guide future priorities, projects, programs and partnerships of Council to development Darebin's economy. Council will continue to listen to the community, businesses, and our stakeholders to ensure that we are responsive and relevant, throughout the lifecycle of the Framework. This lifecycle will involve consultation, design, action plan delivery and evaluation to develop regular action plans from the Framework.

Each action plan from the Framework will be preceded by an interim Evaluation Report, bringing together updated consultation outcomes, new data analysis, feedback and measurements to invest into the next action plan.

## Annual survey

- An annual business survey will be conducted to provide an understanding of what is happening for business and stakeholders within Darebin's economy

## Design

- Every action will have process, performance, outcome and impact evaluation measures built into its design

## Delivery

- Following endorsement of the Economic Framework by Council a rolling Economic Action Plan will inform annual actions for delivery
- Our businesses and partners working with Council on actions will be provided opportunities to engage with their customers and stakeholders to cultivate a feedback loop

## Evaluation

- Participant and recipient feedback, new research and statistical analysis will be used to identify changes, trends, and innovation.

## Acknowledgements

The development of this Framework was supported through the contributions of hundreds of businesses and economic partners in and near Darebin through participation in workshops, completing surveys, sharing their experiences, and reflecting on the materials gathered. Thank you for your contribution. Council looks forward to the many partnerships and projects to be created to realise this Framework's objectives.

## Further reading

If you would like to find out more about the various pieces of information gathered through research and consultation that contributed towards this Framework, please follow this link to information on the Darebin City Council website. **Insert link to be provided for final edit.**

Please contact the Economic Development Unit at Darebin City Council for more information by phone **(03) 8470 8344** or email **business@darebin.vic.gov.au**

*Our vibrant street culture, featuring live music, art, and cultural events, is an integral part of local community identity.*



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