

## Overview

Community Reference Groups (CRGs) were established for each Activity Centre to provide advice to the Department of Transport and Planning in developing its Activity Centre Plans. The advice was developed over 3 sessions in June 2025.

All Statements of Advice will be released publicly alongside other engagement outcomes during Phase 2 engagement planned for September 2025.

## Statement of Advice – Thornbury (High Street, St Georges Road)

### **What we value about the Activity Centre:**

This statement of advice is for both the High St and St Georges Road Activity Centres. Where feedback relates to one Activity Centre specifically, it has been identified below.

#### **Unique Character and Community Spirit**

- One of Thornbury's Activity Centres, High Street reflects a vibrant and diverse urban village deeply rooted in local identity.
- Beyond the thoroughfare of St George's Road, there are quiet pockets of character that are deeply valued.
- The area is a mix of "cool" and "grungy," offering both progressive cultural energy and a sense of authenticity shaped by creative communities and local resilience.
- Residents cherish the small-scale, independent businesses and multicultural shops that embody community values and offer everyday accessibility.
- The centres maintain a friendly, neighbourhood feel where people know one another, enhancing a strong sense of belonging and safety.
- High Street in particular serves as a vital community spine, linking quieter residential streets with active social and commercial spaces.

#### **Heritage, Landmarks and Social Places**

- The historic low-rise shopfronts and heritage architecture, including Psarakos Market, Croxton Park Hotel, and Thornbury Theatre, are cherished for their local and cultural significance.
- Community-favourite venues like Welcome to Thornbury, Carwyn Cellars, and Northcote Social Club offer spaces to gather, celebrate music, and enjoy food and drink.

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- Public parks such as Penders Park, All Nations Park, Mayer Park, and Pearl Reserve provide important spaces for relaxation, play, and nature connection.
  - Spiritual and cultural landmarks, including churches and the Aboriginal Advancement League wall, reflect a layered and inclusive local history.
  - Social infrastructure like childcare centres, youth hubs, and community gardens serve as critical pillars of community life and support.

### **Green Space, Nature and Environmental Values**

- While green spaces exist, many community members feel there is a lack of trees and natural greenery, especially along High Street.
- Parks and creeks, particularly Merri Creek, are central to environmental identity and recreational use, fostering biodiversity and shared environmental care.
- Residents express a strong desire to see better integration of green corridors and natural elements into the urban landscape.
- Privately maintained gardens and trees also play a key role in softening the urban environment and supporting local wildlife.
- Natural drainage lines through the neighbourhoods should be considered in the design of future density and development.

### **Movement, Access and Everyday Use**

- Both centres are well-used pedestrian zones, with locals walking for school, shopping, exercise, and social connection.
- High Street is both a destination and a thoroughfare; however, traffic and parking pressures impact comfort and accessibility.
- Cycling is popular, but many prefer backstreets over High Street due to safety concerns.
- Difficult pedestrian crossings, particularly on St Georges Road, limit safe and easy access between neighbourhoods.

### **What Makes Thornbury Special**

- Thornbury offers a rare balance of inner-city vibrancy and suburban calm, where people can enjoy cultural activities, green outlooks, and neighbourly warmth.
- It's a place of connection—across generations, cultures, and lifestyles—where people feel welcome, known, and involved.
- The area's mid-century charm, creative spirit, and commitment to social and environmental values make it a unique and worthy place for protection and enhancement.
- This is a community that deeply values liveability, sustainability, and a strong sense of place.

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## Our Advice

### Part A: General Advice

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#### *How do we plan for more homes in and around Thornbury while strengthening the things that make it unique?*

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- **Respect the existing character:** New homes should reflect and complement the eclectic and community-centred identity of Thornbury. This includes preserving heritage streetscapes, preserving the frontage of existing diverse and visually different shopfronts. These shopfronts support small independent businesses and activation at the street level to maintain the creative and progressive atmosphere, including the ‘village’ character of the street.
- **Thornbury is made up of a grouping of very distinct areas:** There are diverse areas that have their own opportunities, role in community life, and opportunities for diversity of housing types and use.
- **Build thoughtfully, not just more:** Additional housing must be integrated sensitively into the urban fabric. Prioritise quality over quantity, ensuring developments enhance rather than dominate neighbourhoods.
- **Foster diversity through housing:** A mix of housing types—social, affordable, accessible and family-friendly—will help maintain Thornbury’s inclusivity and support its intergenerational population. This includes thinking about ways to incorporate support living for an aging population.
- **Balance density with liveability:** Moderate increases in density are acceptable where they’re well-designed and matched by green space, transport access, and community infrastructure.
- **Incorporate sustainability:** All future housing should adopt environmentally sustainable designs. This includes green roofs, solar power, rainwater harvesting, and materials that reduce urban heat.
- **Engage the community early:** Residents want meaningful involvement in decisions. Planning should prioritise genuine consultation and visible use of community input.
- **Avoid displacement:** Protect current renters and small business owners from being priced out by rising costs associated with redevelopment.

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- **Distribute change equitably:** Growth should not be concentrated in a few areas. Spread development to avoid overburdening specific precincts and to preserve diverse community identities.

## Part B: Thematic advice across four key areas:

### Public and Green Space

- **Street greenery is essential:** Trees along High Street, Normanby Avenue, Hutton Street, and Arthurton Road are a major community priority. They provide shade, beautify the area, and create a healthier environment. Tree canopy along St George's Road is currently highly valued.
- **Private green space matters too:** Many residents noted the importance of gardens in homes and accommodation. These spaces contribute to biodiversity and a softer streetscape.
- **Small-scale parks are highly valued:** Pocket parks and community-maintained gardens help fill the green space gap in dense areas and offer vital respite points.
- **Not enough green space currently:** Several community members said the amount of greenery is insufficient to support the current or future population. Increasing both the quantity and quality of public green space is essential.
- **Greening the streetscapes:** Incorporating kerbside plantings, planter boxes, and garden beds in parking strips is seen as a simple way to add greenery and enhance streets.
- **Ecological diversity is welcomed:** Native planting and wild spaces (e.g., pollinator gardens, rewilded corridors) are preferred by many over manicured lawns or formal gardens.
- **Make it social and active:** Public green spaces should support both passive enjoyment (e.g., reading, relaxing) and active use (e.g., walking, small gatherings).
- **Connect green places:** Improve linkages between parks through green walking and cycling routes to form a coherent network rather than isolated patches.

### Moving Around

- **High walkability is valued:** Thornbury's walkable grid layout is appreciated and should be preserved. However, improvements are needed to ensure all ages and abilities can walk comfortably and safely.
- **East-west transport is a challenge:** Moving across the area from east to west is especially difficult due to existing single lane roads, which causes congestion and safety issues for all road users. Improving east-west connectivity is a key infrastructure gap, alongside other measures including reducing speed limits along Normanby Avenue.

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- **Major roads are difficult to cross:** High Street and St Georges Road are frequently cited as barriers. More pedestrian crossings and traffic calming measures including speed reductions are needed on Normanby Avenue and St Georges Road
  - **Cycling safety is a serious concern:** Cyclists feel unsafe on High Street and other major arterials including Normanby Avenue and Darebin Road. Protected bike lanes and designated cycling routes are strongly supported.
  - **Public transport options exist but need work:** The area benefits from tram and train access, but frequency, accessibility (especially for people with mobility limitations), and east–west options need improvement.
  - **Lighting and visibility affect comfort:** Many feel uncomfortable using transport hubs or walking at night due to poor lighting and sightlines. Well-lit, open areas are preferred.
  - **Footpath quality varies:** Cracked, narrow, or poorly maintained footpaths discourage walking and create hazards for prams, wheelchairs, and mobility scooters.
  - **Multimodal coordination is lacking:** Better integration of walking, cycling, and public transport—along with wayfinding signage—would enhance ease of movement and reduce car reliance.

## Safety

- **Lighting is a critical issue:** Poor lighting, especially away from major corridors or in parks, makes people feel unsafe. Improving lighting is one of the most raised suggestions by the CRG.
- **Street design affects perception of safety:** Narrow paths, hidden corners, and inactive frontages (e.g. blank walls, carparks) can feel intimidating, especially at night.
- **Dogs and shared spaces:** Concerns were raised about off-leash dogs in areas designated for on-leash use. This impacts families and others who feel vulnerable around uncontrolled pets.
- **Passive surveillance matters:** People feel safer when there are more “eyes on the street,” such as homes or businesses that overlook public spaces.
- **Congestion contributes to tension:** High levels of traffic congestion and competition between cars, bikes, and pedestrians can lead to frustration and unsafe behaviours.
- **Perception varies by time and place:** While some areas feel safe during the day, they may become threatening after dark. Safety improvements need to account for these fluctuations.
- **Informal community watch is effective:** Residents feel safer in places where neighbours know and look out for one another. Planning that supports community interaction can reinforce this.

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- **Physical infrastructure helps:** Wider footpaths, slower speed zones, and designated crossings not only improve accessibility but also reduce accident risks and support safety perceptions.

## Local Infrastructure

- **Connectivity issues affect all infrastructure:** East–west streets are particularly constrained and need upgrades to safely support walking, cycling, and driving simultaneously. This includes suggestions to utilise the train line as another multi-use corridor for active transport.
- **Green infrastructure is a priority:** Residents favour green kerbing, permeable surfaces, and street trees—especially near roads and footpaths—to help manage heat, runoff, and biodiversity.
- **Seating and shade make a difference:** Public seating, especially in shaded or sheltered areas, supports inclusivity for older residents, children, and people with mobility needs.
- **Bins and amenities are lacking:** There’s a need for more rubbish bins, dog bag dispensers, water fountains, and public toilets in high-use areas.
- **Paths and crossings need work:** Better path surfacing on High Street and St George’s Road, more pedestrian crossings, and traffic calming at key intersections (Victoria Road and Darebin Road) are all requested improvements.
- **Space is contested:** Many suggestions relate to balancing space between road users, especially where footpaths, bike lanes, and parking compete.
- **Infrastructure should support community use in multiple ways:** There should be a maximisation of existing community infrastructure such as schools and community buildings, as well as the support of new spaces like community gardens, public art installations, and social spaces should be treated as infrastructure, not optional extras.
- **Digital and smart solutions:** A few responses implied openness to smart infrastructure—such as real-time transport updates for buses or energy-efficient lighting—to improve quality of life.

## Key Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

### Areas of Strong Agreement

- **Greenery is essential:** Everyone agrees on the importance of more green infrastructure—especially trees, small parks, and greener streets.
- **Cycling safety must be improved:** There is universal concern about bike safety and shared road conditions. Protected bike paths are a common request.

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- **Crossing major roads is a challenge:** High Street and St Georges Road are frequently cited as unsafe or difficult to cross, and this is seen as a barrier to community cohesion.
  - **Public transport is valuable but incomplete:** The system is appreciated but has significant gaps, particularly in east–west coverage and universal accessibility.
  - **Lighting improves safety and use:** Poor lighting reduces use of public space and makes residents feel vulnerable—this is a high priority for intervention.
  - **Equity and access must guide change:** Development should not come at the cost of inclusiveness. Ensuring everyone has access to housing and public spaces is a shared value.

### Areas of Disagreement or Mixed Views

- **Balance between cars and active transport:** Some community members still prioritise driving and parking access, while others want cars deprioritised in favour of walking and cycling.
- **Formality of green space:** Some residents favour rewilded, natural green spaces, while others prefer well-maintained and manicured parkland.
- **Definition of infrastructure priorities:** Not everyone agrees on which infrastructure deserves the most investment—views vary between roads, public transport, and social infrastructure.
- **Use and importance of private green space:** While most value gardens and green space in housing, some responses differ on how much emphasis should be placed on private versus public greenery.

## Considerations

The community recognises the need for additional housing but emphasises the importance of managing growth in a balanced way. While there is openness to certain types of change, any support is conditional on thoughtful, place-sensitive planning.

- **Protect established residential areas:**
  - There was a strong consensus that participants were not in favour of applying a traditional radial core and catchment model for the two activity centres. Participants were concerned that a radial core model would mean that there would be an overlapping core covering the entire area between High St and St Georges Road.
- **Respect for neighbourhood character and heritage:**
  - Support for growth was tempered by the need to preserve significant heritage areas and the overall low-rise character of the suburb, and the highly valued existing shop frontage including the veranda style shopfronts along High St.
  - Community members requested design controls to maintain consistency with the existing streetscape, especially in older or culturally valued precincts.

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- **Balance and breaks in density:**

- Several participants expressed that new development should include spacing between taller buildings to prevent overshadowing, overcrowding, and a feeling of visual bulk.
- “Breaks” between dense developments were seen as essential to protect sunlight, sightlines, and the village feel of the area.

- **Link development to amenity and infrastructure:**

- Additional housing should be located near everyday necessities such as supermarkets, green spaces, and public transport.
- Infrastructure improvements should be made in tandem with any rezoning or housing growth to ensure liveability is preserved.
- Participants shared that they would like to see a clear plan in place for how this infrastructure will be identified, planned and funded.

## **Key Areas of Agreement and Disagreement**

### **Areas of Agreement**

- **Preserve heritage and streetscape:** Strong agreement on the need to maintain Thornbury’s unique character through heritage protections and sympathetic urban design.
- **Design matters:** The community agrees that building height alone is not the issue—quality design, spacing, and respect for neighbourhood context are crucial.
- **Access to services is essential:** Housing growth is only acceptable where there is corresponding access to fresh food, transport, and green space.

### **Areas of Disagreement**

- **Extent and location of acceptable density:**

- Some residents were more open to increased density (such as that in a core) provided it was restricted to the central corridors along High St and St Georges Road with limited spill over into the streets on either side.
- Others were more comfortable with a more general spread of up to 6 storeys across a broader area rather than higher density along St Georges Road and High Street only.
- There were also others that recognise that there were other pockets, not necessarily on the transport corridors of High St and St Georges Rd where higher density may be more appropriate. Areas suggested included around transport hubs such as Croxton and Thornbury train stations, and areas around Oakover Road and Miller Street.

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- **Definition of the Activity Centre boundary:** There were differing views on how far the Activity Centre designation should extend and whether a formal and potentially overlapping core for both St Georges Road and High Street was appropriate. There was a number of participants who believed that the Thornbury Activity Centre should be treated as one Activity Centre with two parallel cores (St George's Road and High Street) and one catchment area instead of two Activity Centres due to their close proximity.

## Key Messages for Planners – Thornbury

Final key messages the group would like to leave with decision-makers.

- **Protect Thornbury's unique character and heritage**
  - The community values Thornbury's diverse, creative, and village-like atmosphere.
  - Preserving heritage buildings, existing local businesses and shopfronts, small local businesses and low-rise streetscapes is essential to maintaining this identity.
  - Growth should enhance—not erode—the area's distinct charm and cultural vibrancy.
- **Support targeted and respectful housing growth**
  - Residents are open to more homes along key corridors like High Street, St Georges Road, and near train stations (Thornbury and Croxton).
  - Housing growth must be balanced with quality design, access to services, and appropriate building scale.
- **Make green space and nature a priority**
  - The community wants more street trees, pocket parks, parks with a purpose (e.g. dog off-lead parks being separate from sporting fields) and natural planting to soften urban areas and support wellbeing.
  - They requested that there is an investigation of the use of the rail-corridor reserves as a multi-use green path which is currently being underutilised. This would also play a role as being an important wildlife habitat and biodiversity corridor.
  - They wanted to recognise the role of this area as a connection between Merri Creek and Darebin Creek and prioritise bio-diverse plantings as a wildlife corridors.
  - Green infrastructure should be integrated throughout the Activity Centre—not limited to traditional park spaces. Particularly where green front and back yards are being reduced to make way for higher density.
  - Connectivity between green areas through walking and cycling routes is highly valued.

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- Open spaces, outside of green spaces, such as shared community spaces should also be investigated.

- **Improve transport, access, and safety for all**

- Walking and cycling are key to daily life, but safety and accessibility need improvement—especially on High Street and St George’s road along the east-west connection.
- Thoroughfares and safer cycling crossings on High Street and St George’s Road, as well as other north-south main arterial roads, and better lighting are widely supported.
- The existing rail corridor offers a key improvement opportunity for north-south active transport movement, building on the sky-rail works in the north and connecting to Northcote. Miller Street also provides opportunities for east-west connection.
- Public transport options must be more frequent, accessible and better connected, particularly east–west.

- **Plan with and for the community**

- People want to be part of shaping their neighbourhood and expect early, transparent engagement in planning decisions.
- Continued engagement of the Community Reference Group for Thornbury is desired by the group, particularly once the draft plans are available in Phase 2.
- Equitable development is essential—change should be spread fairly and avoid displacing vulnerable residents.
- Trust is built when community input is clearly reflected in outcomes and local needs are respected.