

Dandenong Activity Centre Historic Narrative



Introduction

- > The area in which Greater Dandenong is now located is the territory of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung (or Bunurong) tribes of the Kulin Nation and has been for tens of thousands of years. The availability and occurrence of water most influenced living patterns in prehistory and concentrations of Indigenous people occurred around the former Carrum Swamp, the floodplain, wetlands and elevated areas along Dandenong Creek. Cultural, ceremonial and spiritual life was dictated by the seasons through the availability of sustainable natural resources and closely observed changes in plant growth and animal behaviour.

Aboriginal living patterns were severely disrupted when European settlers arrived in the Port Phillip region. The Aboriginal population declined by 80 per cent in the period from 1834 to 1850. When compounded by the loss of land and the disappearance of traditional ways of life, the adverse effects for local indigenous people were dramatic.

Cultural heritage sites remaining within the City representing these early periods include the remains of important meeting and ceremonial sites for Aboriginal tribes, many of which still have deep significance and meaning for contemporary Aboriginal residents.

There are important groups of highly valued scarred trees on public and private land. Many of the trees exhibit scars representing the harvesting of bark for manufacture of items for daily use. Some scars are foot and hand holds which provided access to the upper reaches of trees for food sources such as honey.

Upon the township of Dandenong being laid it soon became a trading centre for farmers and graziers establishing it as 'The Market Town' with a livestock produce and goods market started in 1866. By 1873 the Shire of Dandenong was a large region that covered the areas of Springvale and Noble Park as well as Dandenong.

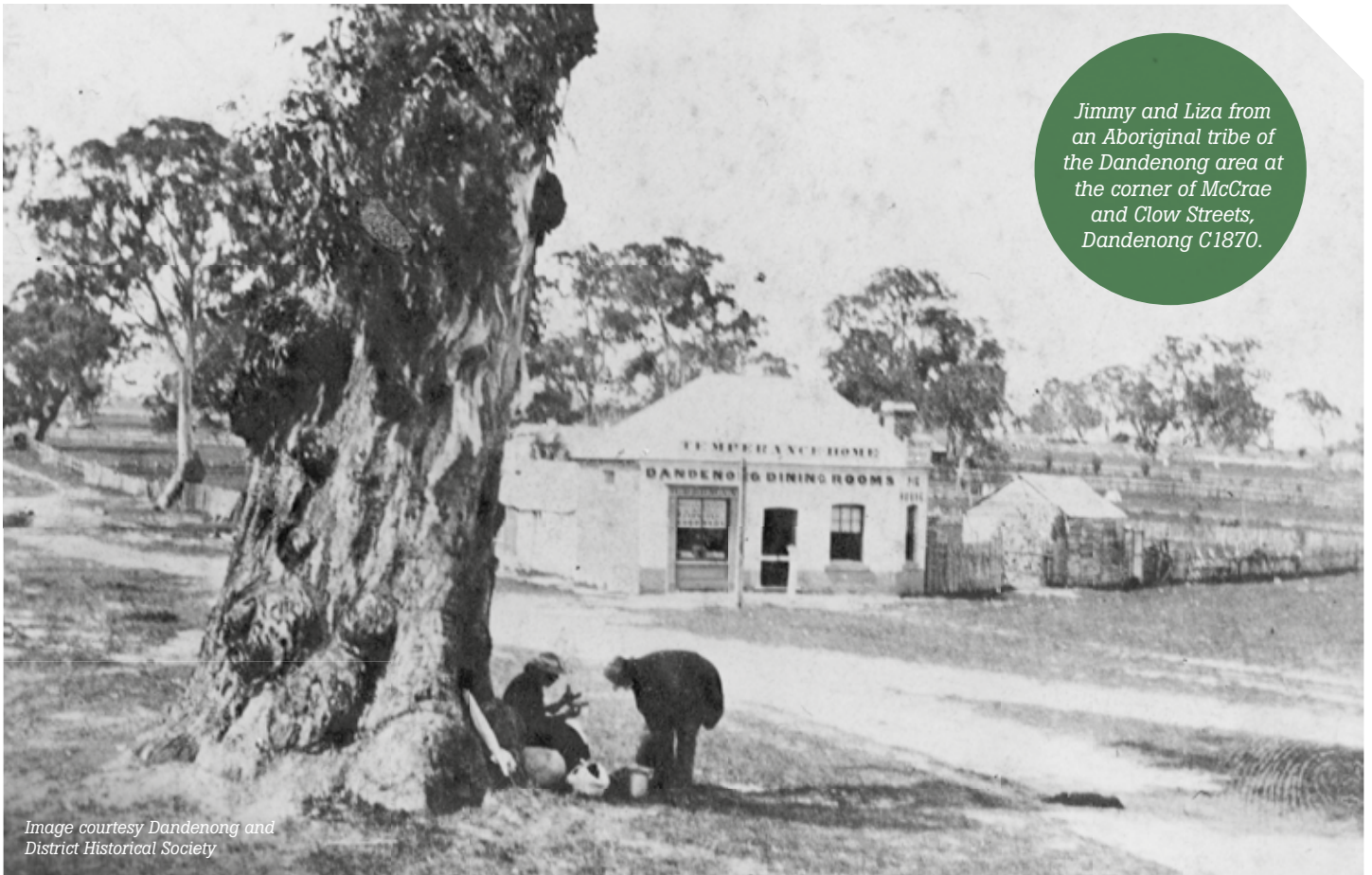
The rapid growth of the region and the pressure to provide urban services, particularly after World War II, resulted in the formation of two cities; when in 1955 Springvale and Noble Park Shire was created by severance from Dandenong Shire. Dandenong was proclaimed a City in 1959 and Springvale (including Noble Park) followed in 1961. Each city developed a unique character in response to local conditions.

Council amalgamations triggered by the State Government of Victoria led to the formation of the City of Greater Dandenong on 15 December 1994. Most of the former City of Dandenong, City of Springvale, as well as small parts of the former City of Berwick and City of Cranbourne were proclaimed the 'City of Greater Dandenong' by Order of the Governor in Council.

The City of Greater Dandenong today is a culturally diverse place to live, work and visit. Located approximately 35km from Melbourne CBD and encompassing an area of 129 sq km², Greater Dandenong has a population of approximately 159,000, with residents from over 150 different birthplaces; making it the most multicultural municipality in Victoria.



*Dandenong Floods, 1901
Image courtesy Dandenong and District Historical Society*



Jimmy and Liza from an Aboriginal tribe of the Dandenong area at the corner of McCrae and Clow Streets, Dandenong C1870.

Image courtesy Dandenong and District Historical Society

Dandenong

Dandenong was a land of river red gums, creek floodplains and dry heathland. Large black eels and waterbirds clustered in great schools in the underbrush of Dandenong Creek which flows to the south. The creek was a natural source of life for Aboriginal people and attracted early settlers.

An Aboriginal Station and Native Police Corps were established in the mid 1800's and this later became known as The Police Paddocks. Aboriginal people knew the location of Dandenong Police Paddocks as Nerre Nerre Warren and under Captain Dana, were involved in dealing with disputes between Aboriginal and European people. Today it is a reserve that contains Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and areas of significant indigenous vegetation.

The beautiful Dandenong and Eumemmerring Creek flats, thickly timbered landscape (gum, box and stringy bark) and deep soil made the area an early agricultural centre and by 1837, about the same time Melbourne was being settled, it was taken as a pastoral run. The milling of the red gum timber became an important industry to meet Melbourne's requirements. Charcoal burning, tanning, quarrying and brick making also flourished.

The watershed from the combined Dandenong and Eumemmerring Creeks and occurrence of the Little Swamp (Carrum Swamp) and the Great Swamp (Koo-wee-rup Swamp) challenged early European settlement and created frequent and major flooding. Flood is one of Dandenong's great natural occurrences and older residents vividly recall perilous rescues and entire streets including Lonsdale Street completely submerged in water.

Dunbar's Dandenong Hotel located on Lonsdale Street served also as a store and post office in the 1850s. The first meeting of the District Roads Board, the first court hearings and early church services were held at Dunbar's.

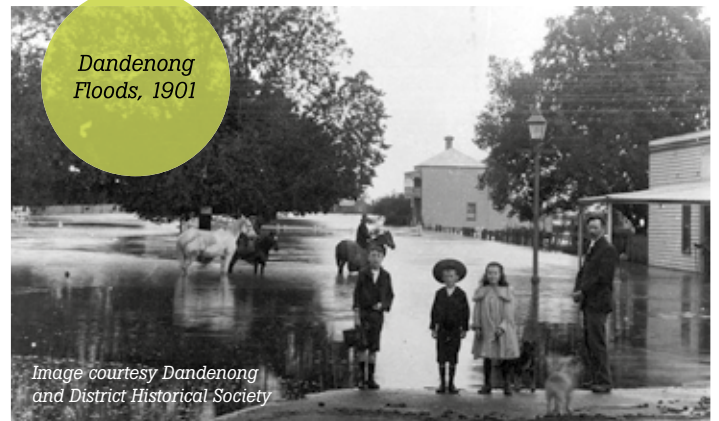


Image courtesy Dandenong and District Historical Society

Flood is one of Dandenong's great natural occurrences and older residents vividly recall perilous rescues.

Dandenong Road was surveyed in 1852, following wheel tracks and footprints to become the busiest route from Melbourne marking its progress from a settlement to a town. It forms part of Princes Highway which circumnavigates Australia, joining all mainland state capitals and spanning a total length of approximately 14,500 km.

Community life and citizenship was expressed through the formation of various organisations, one of the earliest being the Mechanics Institute. A modest timber building was erected in 1863, and later a fine brick hall doubling its size. The location was eventually used for the town hall.

Old Dandenong
Market, Lonsdale
and McCrae
Streets, 1924



Image courtesy Dandenong and
District Historical Society

The early growth and continued prosperity of Dandenong is closely linked to the presence and success of the stock and produce markets from 1866. The markets originally operated from a single site at the corner of Lonsdale and McCrae streets, before moving to Cleeland Street and later the stock market separated to Cheltenham Road. They provided a direct outlet for livestock including beef and dairy cattle, poultry and horses, for fresh market garden and dairy products, and for a wide variety of household, craft and industrial goods and services. By 1870 fortnightly trading expanded to every Tuesday and Dandenong came alive with the bustle of livestock being herded to and from the market.

The livestock market brought farmers to the area from all over Victoria and the produce market catered for the wives and children, making market day a loved family outing and chance to enjoy a meal in nearby coffee palaces (family friendly alternatives to hotels). The combined productivity of farmland and the markets made Dandenong grow into a major regional centre in Victoria and it became known as the "Gateway to Gippsland".

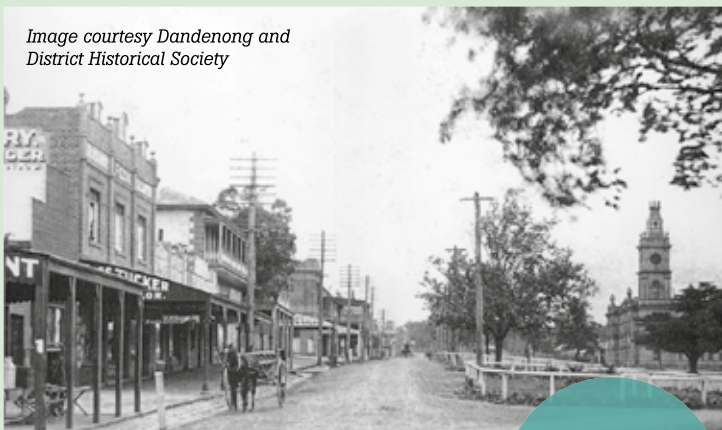
As Dandenong's population steadily expanded people became less accepting of traditional agricultural realities; including the regular noisy and dusty procession of livestock through the town centre. In 1958 after almost 90 years of argument and discussion the stock market was separated and moved to a larger site in Cheltenham Road behind the railway yards. There it remained for a further 40 years – the last municipal owned and operated facility in Victoria, before closing on 22 December 1998.

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Dandenong Park located to the south of the town centre and bounded by Dandenong Creek was formally gazetted in 1873. It assumed the character of a Victorian park featuring a wooden bandstand, flat lawns, parklands and exotic trees together with mature indigenous red gums that were part of the original landscape. In the 1870s and 80s clubs for croquet, lawn bowls, football and cricket were established. Shepley Oval, the centrepiece of Dandenong Park's sports facilities, was set aside for recreational purposes in 1881 supporting major sporting teams until the early 1900s. For the next five decades major sporting activities were held at the showgrounds, next to the market. Shepley Oval was improved in the late 1950s, a grandstand opened in 1959, and it became the region's main elite sports venue. A pair of wrought iron gates (from the Springvale Public Cemetery) was secured as an entrance feature and erected in 1961 in memory of Mr Harry Shepley.

A range of community facilities have been part of the Dandenong Park history and evolution. A former drill hall existed on the south side of the Dandenong Creek until 2007 and was used as a recruitment centre during both world wars. Occasionally it hosted community gatherings, dances, social activities and was used as a temporary hospital. In addition there was a popular swimming pool, Dandenong Baths, alongside the drill hall and within the northern section of the park the Sound Shell built in the late 1960's. The Sound Shell was later named after Mr Stan Prior a Dandenong identity and the municipal brass bands oldest practicing member who was still playing with them in his 100th year. The Sound Shell was the backdrop for Christmas carols, religious events and Australia Day celebrations for half a century.

Image courtesy Dandenong and District Historical Society



Lonsdale Street looking north toward Walker Street, 1910

Early schools in Dandenong were established through religious institutions and the first government school, Dandenong State School (number 1403) opened as the direct result of an application from the citizens for a state school in 1874. It was first at the corner of Robinson and Foster streets before moving to its present location on the corner of Foster and New streets.

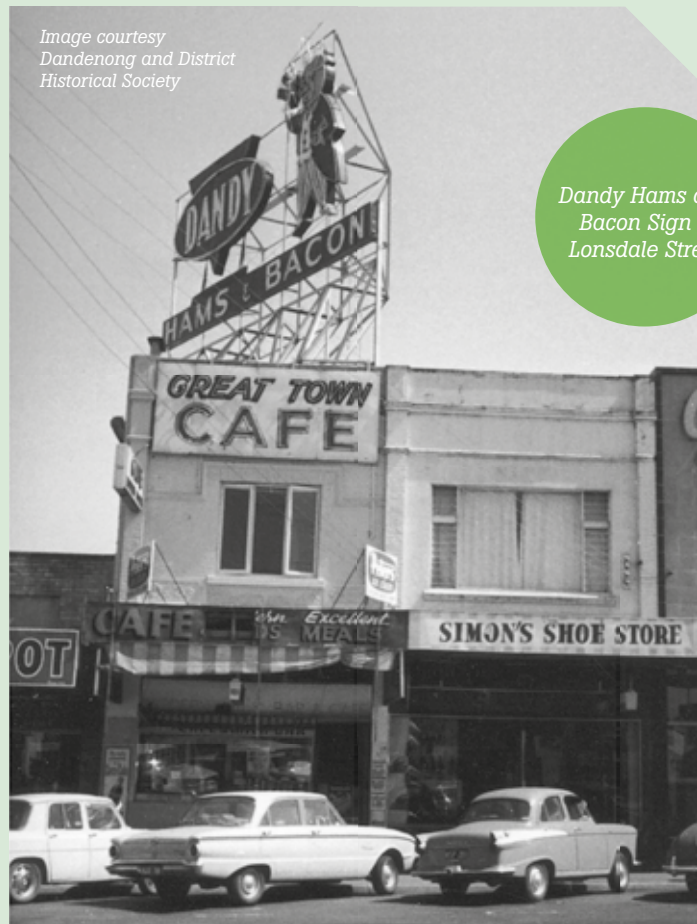
Numerous places of worship followed the increase of churches from various denominations that served the township of Dandenong and the surrounding area.

Dandenong Station opened in 1877 as one of the original stations on the Melbourne to Sale railway line. The station buildings were rebuilt in 1975 and again in 1995 as part of the electrification project to Cranbourne. The new station featuring large areas of glass was opened by the former Prime Minister Paul Keating.

After considerable opposition to there being a town hall, prominent architect Beswicke and Hutchins designed the graceful Dandenong Town Hall which opened in 1890. It has remained Dandenong's most prominent and enduring landmark. Constructed at a cost of 9,269 pounds it was made using local bricks and housed the council chamber, provided an upper level room for the activities of the Mechanics Institute and library and incorporated a law court. The Town Hall symbolises the civic and community heart of Dandenong and is commonly associated with people's fondest memories about the area. The town hall hosted much loved social dances, concerts, fund raisers debutante balls, pageants, boxing, wrestling, immunisations and for more than five decades its most prevailing community event the Dandenong Festival of Music and Art for Youth. A major reconstruction and expansion of the site went ahead in the late 1930s and the enlarged hall re-opened in October 1940. The hall has seen large gatherings; to welcome returning WWI soldiers, 'Back to Dandenong' celebrations in 1933, Declaration of Dandenong as a City in 1959 and Town Hall Centenary celebrations in 1990. On more sombre occasions it was the rallying point for community efforts to assist with responses to natural disasters including the local 1934 floods, Cyclone Tracey and Ash Wednesday.

The Gippsland Co-operative Bacon Curing Company was formed by a group of pig farmers in 1911, who established the 'Dandy Bacon Factory'. It grew over the next 50 years to being able to process 156,000 pigs per year, of which almost one third of these were purchased through the Dandenong Stock Market. The factory employed many local residents, and is considered one of the major catalysts for the growth and development of Dandenong as a major industrial city. In association with advertising the Hams and Bacon Factory the Dandy Pig neon sign was created in the 1950s and positioned on top of shops in Lonsdale Street where it remained for over

Image courtesy Dandenong and District Historical Society



Dandy Hams and Bacon Sign – Lonsdale Street

...featuring a finely dressed pig in formal morning dress attire, doffing his top hat to welcome motorists entering Dandenong.

30 years. It was one of the first animated advertising signs in the region featuring a finely dressed pig in formal morning dress attire, doffing his top hat to welcome motorists entering Dandenong. When the co-operative closed in 1983, the Dandy Pig was dismantled, placed into storage, and ownership was passed to Council. The Dandy Pig was later restored and is now located at the Dandenong Market where it once again animates the Dandenong skyline.

In 1919 Dandenong High School opened a short distance north of the town centre on Dandenong Road delivering education to young adults who made the long trek by foot, bike, bus and train from surrounding areas in the district.

In the main street, variety stores for Woolworths and Coles were located side by side opposite the town hall. Both businesses started as variety stores (Coles in 1914, Woolworths in 1924) before expanding into supermarkets in the post war years.

Following the establishment of early private hospitals in Dandenong between the late 1890's and 1922, it was Murray House Hospital near the corner of Thomas and Scott streets that became the most well-known. It was run by the Thompson sisters from 1929. In 1937 a campaign got underway to work towards a community hospital and immediately prior to the outbreak of WWII a five acre site was purchased at Cleeland and David streets. By 1942 the Dandenong and District Hospital opened with its first two patients and 34 beds.

After WWII, the post-war industrial boom brought an influx of European migrants, particularly from Italy and Greece. This increase in migration and industry brought prosperity to the area. In the 1950s, as Melbourne rapidly expanded south east along the Princes Highway and Dandenong railway line, Dandenong became a major metropolitan manufacturing and commercial area. General Motors Holden, International Harvester and Heinz all built large industrial factories in the area where the giant river red gums once stood. For decades they provided employment and prosperity beyond Dandenong into the region and this was reflected in housing, retail and commercial expansion.

As one of Australia's fastest growing metropolitan areas, Dandenong was of interest to major retailers. Grocery chains such as Moran & Cato, Crooks National Stores and Crofts opened branches in Dandenong in the interwar years. But it was the post-war years when retailing was fully transformed and Dandenong became a 'boom town'. Dandenong had a successful Buy in Dandenong Campaign and the largest Chamber of Commerce in Victoria (outside of Melbourne). Retailers realised there was an expanding, selective and important community and began to buy land to set up shop. Prices soared in the central section of the city and for a time Lonsdale Street was referred to as the Golden Mile.

In November 1963 the Coles Company opened in Dandenong what was then Australia's largest free standing supermarket, with 14 checkouts and about 50 meters of refrigerated cabinets. The new store adopted a Dandenong identity with four feature windows depicting early local landmarks from 100 years ago.

The produce and goods market, which we know today as the Dandenong Market added Friday trading in 1976 and expanded to Saturday trading in 1982.

Myer opened in Dandenong in 1974 offering a four level, stand-alone department store and became a significant retail attraction for the region. Following a popular 1980/90's trend Palm Plaza mall was created through the closure of McCrae Street, providing a fully pedestrian thoroughfare and palm tree-lined outdoor space linking Myer and the Market.



Image courtesy Dandenong and District Historical Society

Dandenong Market 1974

.. the Coles Company opened in Dandenong what was then Australia's largest free standing supermarket

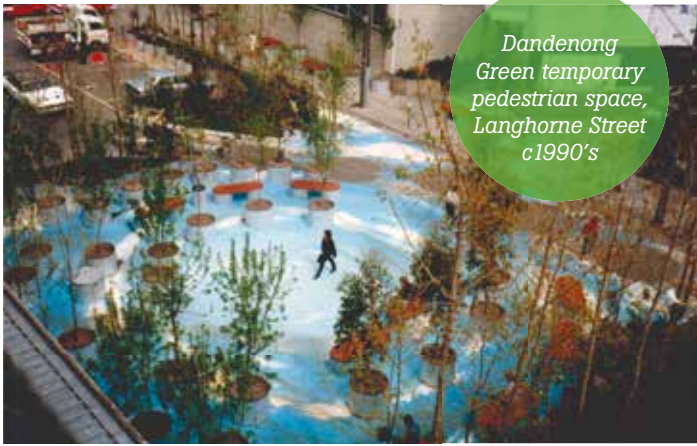
A renovation to Myer in 1995 saw Myer reduced to three levels. Target occupied the ground level, moving from its position in Lonsdale Street. Dandenong Plaza Shopping Centre emerged (from the smaller Capital Centre) and grew to attract an impressive line-up of retailers including the major supermarkets and popular national and international brand stores all under one roof. This impacted Lonsdale Street and resulted in the closure of many shops in the main street and on the western side of the activity centre.

By the mid 1980's the retail landscape was changing, Woolworths closed and was divided into two stores. Coles variety store lasted longer into the early 1990s before closure and conversion to Bargain Home Furnishings then discount chain Chemist Warehouse. Both Coles and Woolworths continued to trade elsewhere in central Dandenong.



The largest Coles New World in Australia, Princes Highway Dandenong 1963

Image courtesy Coles Myer Ltd



*Dandenong
Green temporary
pedestrian space,
Langhorne Street
c1990's*



*Dandenong
Market after
redevelopment
2011*



*'Stockyard'
artwork defines the
Stockmans Bridge
the western entry
to Dandenong,
2010*

Image courtesy Mark Wilson Photography

The downturn in trade on the western side of the central business district and resulting vacancies presented opportunities for emerging cultural groups keen to service a diverse customer base. In 1990, the Little India cultural precinct emerged in Foster Street and grew organically to a cluster of 30 individual businesses. By 2015 it was home to Museum India and recognised as Victoria's first ever Indian Cultural Precinct. In 2000 the Afghan Bazaar cultural precinct in Thomas Street swelled to a recognisable concentration of specialty shops. Both precincts continue to perform a social, economic and cultural role and incorporate restaurants and take-away food in addition to clothing and groceries.

Throughout the period 1995–2003 generally poor retail conditions, declining investment, negative perceptions and low socio-economic circumstances prevailed. Retail offerings were expanding on the periphery of Dandenong and shoppers were increasingly attracted to nearby hard top centres including Fountain Gate, Endeavour Hills, Parkmore and Waverley Gardens.

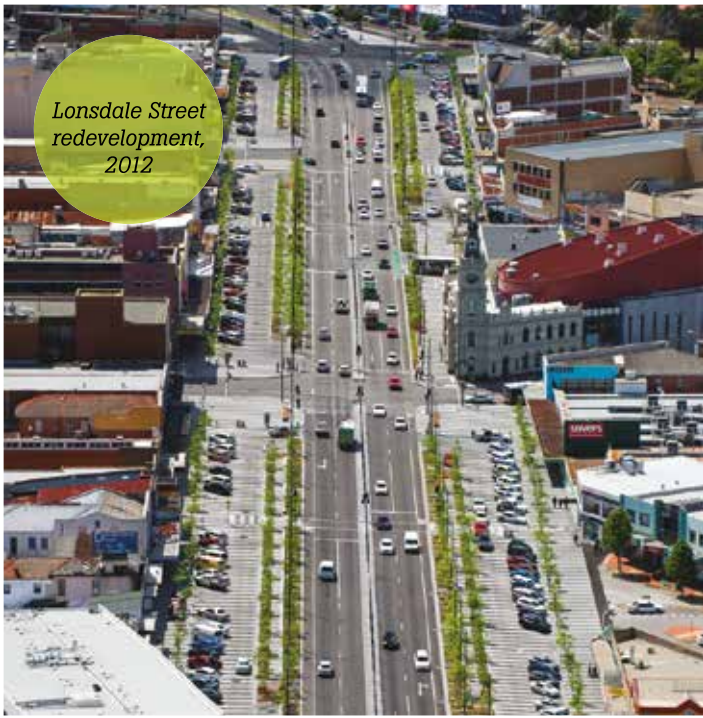
In 2005–06 the conditions and political environment combined to trigger a \$290 million Revitalising Central Dandenong initiative to attract 5000 jobs, 4000 dwellings and \$1 billion of private sector investment. The project recognised Dandenong as a major activity centre with a valuable central location, access to transport, housing and employment. The Revitalising Central Dandenong initiative would bring a decade of unprecedented change and large scale development on a level unrivalled elsewhere in Victoria. As part of the initiative and using land formally occupied by the market stockyards, the residential community Metro Village 3175 was established. It offered contemporary housing options in the heart of central Dandenong and within walking distance to its major attractions.

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After years of community consultation and a strong desire to re-establish the town hall as the heart of the town, a major redevelopment was funded to convert the building into a performing arts venue. Opened in 2006 and consisting of a 520 seat auditorium with fly tower and orchestra pit, rehearsal rooms, and conference facilities, the award winning Drum Theatre emerged and included restoration of the 1890s historic façade and clock tower.

In 2010, a new western gateway to Dandenong opened triggering the re-alignment of George and Walker streets. The resulting Stockmans Bridge was named by the community and features a 62 metre integrated artwork that recognises and celebrates the importance of the livestock market to the development of Dandenong.

In 2011, Dandenong Market underwent a \$26 million redevelopment to ensure it would remain Dandenong's most recognised cultural icon and fresh food shopping destination with an expanded meat, fish and deli section and expansive new general merchandise trading halls. The market added Sunday trading to extend its operating hours to four days per week.

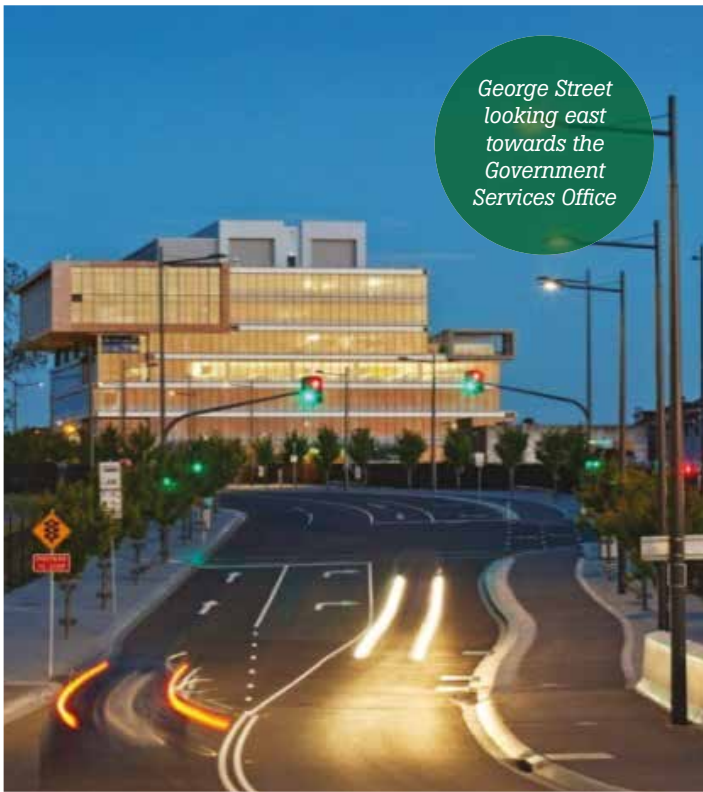


Lonsdale Street redevelopment, 2012



Civic precinct municipal offices, library and Harmony Square

Dandenong's main street, referred to as 'the golden mile' in the 1950's, underwent a once in a lifetime \$20 million redevelopment...



George Street looking east towards the Government Services Office



Quest Apartments opened 2016

A urban renewal focus on the western side of Dandenong saw the opening of the Government Services Building in 2012 consolidating the State Government's workforce into one central location. A few years later demolition of the former AMP building and Hanover Arcade took place to make way for the \$65 million municipal offices, council chamber, library and Harmony Square which opened in 2014. The new location for the library and state of the art offerings saw patronage grow from 8,000–20,000 people per week. This has reintroduced civic uses into the heart of Dandenong's retail offer and strengthened its role as a centre for government administration and community life.

In late 2015, the state government formerly recognised Dandenong as Melbourne's Indian Cultural Precinct for all Victorians' raising its status and heralding a level of recognition. The Australian Taxation Office opened its new offices on George Street and by late 2016 Quest Apartments were completed adding to the high quality accommodation offer in the centre by Ramada Encore and Punthill Apartment Hotel.

Dandenong's main street, commonly referred to as 'the golden mile' during the 1950s, underwent a once in a life time \$20 million redevelopment in 2010-11. The expansive streetscape incorporated increased lighting, a unique colonnade of coloured feature lights along the centre median, generously wide footpaths, planting of 260 Pin Oak trees, public spaces and water sustainability features.

Despite the energy and momentum created by the revitalisation initiative and investment in the town hall and market, Myer closed its doors in 2013 after a period of retail stagnation which aligned with the opening of a new store at Fountain Gate. Dandenong Plaza managers, responded by investing \$30 million in a redevelopment with new mini majors Aldi, JBHi-Fi, Trade Secret and Daiso, adding to the offer of 163 tenancies anchored by Kmart, Safeway, Reading Cinema and Coles. The centre was purchased in late 2015 by Armada Funds Management.

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