

# Greater Dandenong Annual Report 2013-14



# our vision

## Our Vision

Greater Dandenong is a safe and vibrant city of opportunity for all – to visit, work, live and play.

## Our Key Strategic Objectives

### People

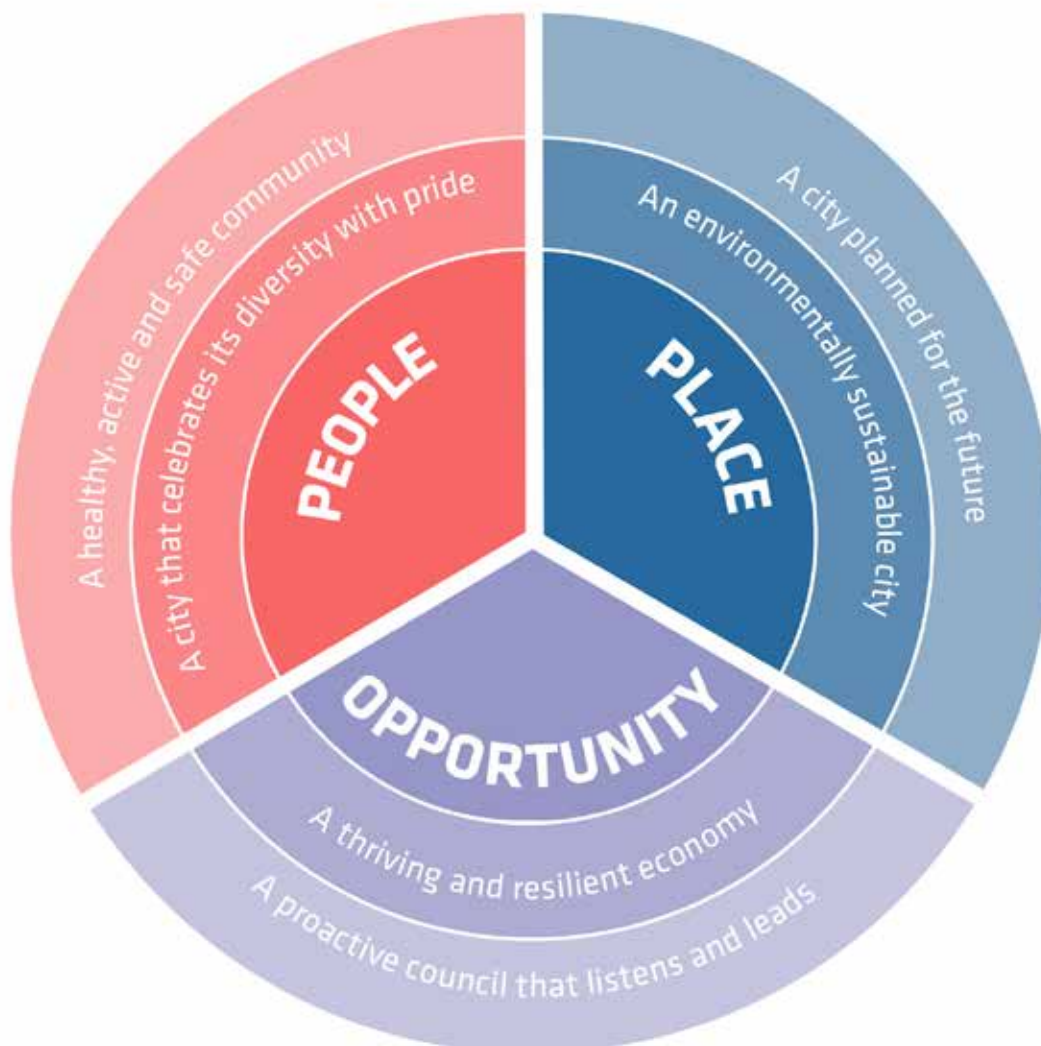
- A healthy, active and safe community
- A city that celebrates its diversity with pride

### Place

- An environmentally sustainable city
- A city planned for the future

### Opportunity

- A thriving and resilient economy
- A proactive council that listens and leads



# Our Great City



## Great Place

- ▶ Recognised as the capital of Melbourne's south-east
- ▶ Outstanding new library facility and civic space in central Dandenong
- ▶ Victoria's manufacturing heartland and home to 12,500 businesses
- ▶ Playground and picnic areas upgraded across the city
- ▶ Boasting 615.5 hectares of open space including 198 parks
- ▶ Revitalisation of activity centres – Dandenong, Springvale and Noble Park
- ▶ Quality infrastructure including 660km of local roads and 1,098km of footpaths

## Great People

- ▶ Over 147,000 residents
- ▶ People from over 150 nations
- ▶ 60 per cent of residents born overseas
- ▶ 64 per cent of residents speak languages other than English
- ▶ Over 70,000 people employed locally
- ▶ Over 400 local community groups and service clubs
- ▶ An active and committed volunteer community

## Great Times

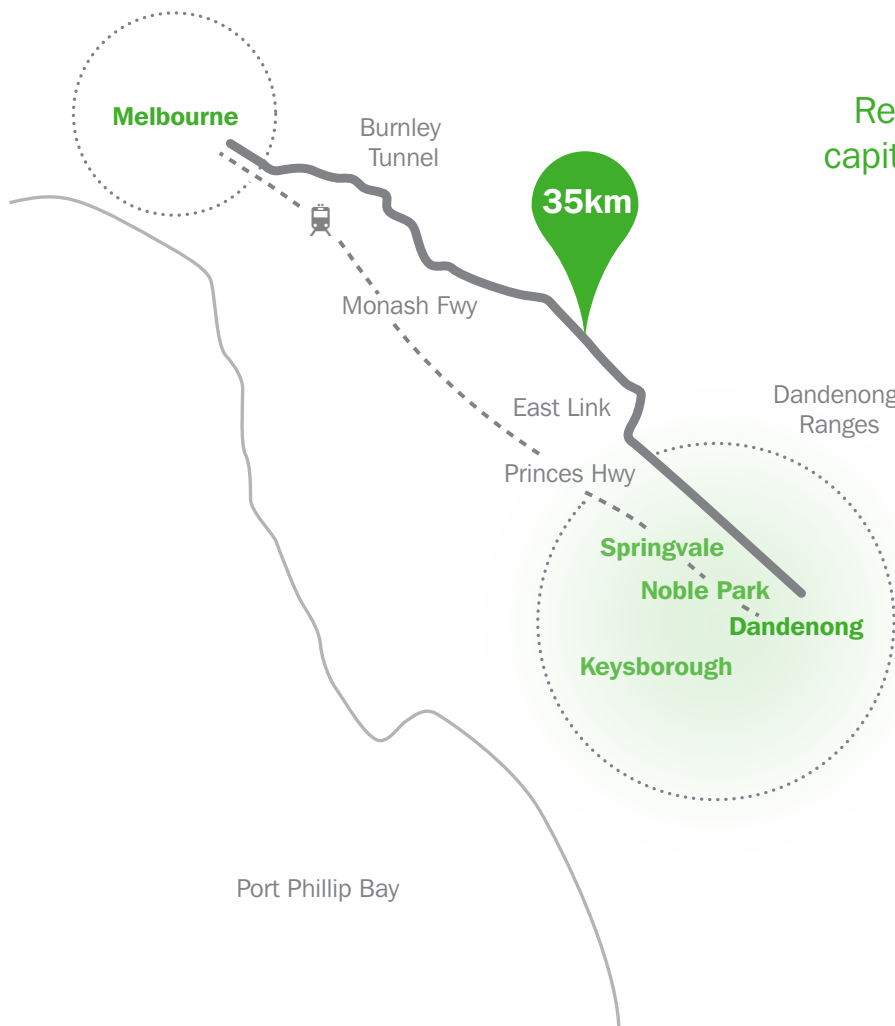
- ▶ State-of-the-art cultural facilities including the multi-million dollar Drum Theatre
- ▶ Arts events and festivals held monthly
- ▶ Sandown Racing – cars, horses and greyhounds
- ▶ Scenic bike paths stretching 53km from Jells Park to Carrum Beach
- ▶ 200 active sports clubs
- ▶ Largest basketball and volleyball stadium in the southern hemisphere
- ▶ Indoor and outdoor swimming pools
- ▶ Victoria's largest Lunar New Year festival

## Great Shops

- ▶ The iconic Dandenong Market
- ▶ Little India and Afghan Bazaar cultural precincts
- ▶ Modern shopping complexes at Dandenong and Keysborough
- ▶ Wide variety of cultural cuisine and fresh produce
- ▶ Over 50 Asian restaurants and specialty supermarkets
- ▶ Extensive range of factory outlets
- ▶ Showcase of cuisines from around the world



# our city



Recognised as the capital of Melbourne's south-east.

# Our Great City



## Snapshot of Greater Dandenong

### Geography and Population

- Greater Dandenong encompasses an area of 129 square kilometres in Melbourne's south-east, approximately 35km from Melbourne's CBD.
- Around 147,000 people live in Greater Dandenong.

### Cultural Diversity

- The City of Greater Dandenong is the most culturally diverse community in Victoria.
- Greater Dandenong is the second most diverse community in Australia, with residents from over 150 different birthplaces.
- Over half (60 per cent) of our population were born overseas, with 55 per cent from nations where English is not the main spoken language, double the Melbourne metropolitan average of 26 per cent.
- Birthplaces include Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, India, China, Italy, Greece, Bosnia, Afghanistan, New Zealand and Britain.
- The number of Greater Dandenong residents born overseas rose 13,700 between 2006-11 including more than 6,000 Indian-born residents, nearly 2,000 Sri Lankans, 1,100 Vietnamese and 900 Afghans.
- The diversity of this city is reflected in the range of religious faiths including Buddhism (18 per cent), Islam (11 per cent), Hinduism (4 per cent) and Christianity (50 per cent).

### Spoken Languages

Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of the residents of Greater Dandenong speak languages other than English – the largest proportion in Victoria, and twice the corresponding metropolitan level. The most widely spoken languages in this community are Vietnamese, Khmer, Chinese, Greek, Punjabi and Sinhalese.

One in seven residents – accounting for 19,000 people or 14 per cent of the population – has limited fluency in spoken English – four times the metropolitan level of 4 per cent. Among residents who speak languages other than English at home, 39 per cent had limited English fluency, including 50 per cent of women and 30 per cent of men. Substantial numbers of residents who speak Vietnamese, Khmer and Chinese languages have limited English fluency.

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# Message from the Mayor



## Message from the Mayor

The past year has seen major changes in the City of Greater Dandenong with the opening of the new Greater Dandenong Civic Centre which boasts the incredible new Dandenong Library, outdoor civic space, Big Screen, community meeting spaces and city chambers.

This major project was opened in March 2014 with a grand opening celebration held in April which attracted thousands of community members.

The new Library has been enthusiastically embraced by the community with record numbers of people visiting to experience state-of-the-art technology, computer gaming area, expanded children's area and more.

The \$65 million project is a flagship endeavour of the significant public and private Revitalising Central Dandenong project that has transformed the area.

## Community Satisfaction Survey Results

We were once again extremely pleased to perform well in the annual State-wide Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey.

Our residents rated Greater Dandenong's performance well above the state average in all areas.

When compared with 10 other councils in the outer metropolitan areas, Greater Dandenong either outperformed or equalled its neighbours in all areas.

These results reflect Council's commitment to excellent customer service and continuous improvement. We are high achievers and will continue to strive to be the best and serve our community with excellence.

The Community Satisfaction Survey results can be found on page 51 of this report.

## A Voice for Our Community

Council has taken a proactive advocacy role over the past year to act as a voice for our community.

We have successfully called on the Victorian and Australian Governments to improve services, provide additional funding and make policy changes to improve the lives of our community.

The new Dandenong Civic Centre received substantial funding from the Australian Government (\$6 million from the Regional Development Fund) and the Victorian Government (\$1.25 million from the Living Libraries Infrastructure and Community Support Programs).

Other projects Council has successfully obtained funding for include \$3.4 million to upgrade nine local kindergartens, \$1 million to build three new early learning centres and \$200,000 to upgrade Menzies Avenue Dandenong North – just to include a few.

We have also been a strong voice for positive change in our community in many ways, including organising the successful White Ribbon Day march through central Dandenong, lobbying the Victorian Government for tighter controls on electronic gaming machines in our community and supporting the proposed Port of Hastings expansion which will boost the region's economy.

These are just a few highlights of the many ways Council is working to build an even stronger, connected and resilient community in Greater Dandenong.

Cr Jim Memeti  
Mayor





“The new Library has been enthusiastically embraced by the community with record numbers of people visiting to experience state-of-the-art technology, computer gaming area, expanded children’s area and more.”

*Mayor Jim Memeti*



# Chief Executive Officer's Report



In its first months of operation, the Civic Centre has hosted remarkable levels of attendance and participation – and demonstrated overwhelming levels of community pride and satisfaction for a facility the community can now call their own.

## Chief Executive Officer's Report

The most significant civic event and public building launch since the 'Grand Old Lady', Dandenong Town Hall was opened in 1888, occurred in this financial year, when on 12 April 2014, Mayor Jim Memeti and his Council colleagues officially opened the Greater Dandenong Civic Centre.

The journey towards this outcome has been reported over many Annual Reports and any delay in delivery of this iconic facility has been due entirely to the cautious, objective, diligent and strong corporate governance practices exercised by successive Councils.

It is a tribute to this Council that it has committed itself to, and now delivered upon, this outcome on behalf of the Greater Dandenong community.

In its first months of operation, the Civic Centre has hosted remarkable levels of attendance and participation – and demonstrated overwhelming levels of community pride and satisfaction for a facility the community can now call their own. The new Dandenong Library opened on 17 March 2014 and has experienced a significant increase in attendance since. The Dandenong Library, a key anchor activity in the Centre, has generated an average 2,584 visits per day/18,009 visits per week since opening – well above the highest previously recorded. The Civic Square, still in its infancy as a key attractor, has accommodated people with diverse interests from the opening event, to the increasingly popular *Nocturnal*, to the World Cup soccer final and any number of other micro activities.

It would not be an overstatement to suggest that this Centre – with its Library, state of the art community facilities, civic square, next generational screen, community meeting spaces and commercial rental opportunities – has exceeded all expectations.

It is appropriate to place great emphasis on the delivery of this project – for which contractual documentation demonstrates on-time completion, to highly specified standards and close to \$1 million below the project budget – as this outcome reinforces the 'capacity' of a Council and community that have a vision for better public places.

While celebrating this long awaited outcome, it can also be noted that this was achieved without any adverse impact on service delivery; unforeseen or predicted budget impacts; and maintaining ongoing and high customer satisfaction ratings.

With this signature project now complete, Greater Dandenong's standing as a prominent city in a developing region is reinforced and the presentation of Dandenong as a Central Activity Area within Melbourne's 'poly-centric city' framework remains sound.

This Council does not rest however, and 2014-15 will see the commencement of the next Council revitalisation project – the implementation of the 'Springvale Civic Centre Master Plan'. Specific actions in 2014-15 are limited, but by the end of the next financial year and as we move into 2015-16, the new vision for this important precinct in Springvale will begin to emerge.

Greater Dandenong is highly regarded as a revitalising city that:

- increasingly responds to regional needs
- has principal and neighbourhood activity centres that reflect growing standards of amenity and opportunity
- is well-served by public transport (but with many remaining needs)
- has significantly improved infrastructure and assets, and
- remains a centre for employment in the region.

This holistic approach of including Springvale, Noble Park and Keysborough – along with Dandenong – into any discussion on Greater Dandenong, is a hallmark of the success that the community will ultimately enjoy.

The State Government's commitment to grade separate the Dandenong rail line from Springvale Road materialised in 2013-14 and from the moment the ribbon was cut on the physical separation of road from rail, decongestion benefits emerged and opportunities for the future of the activity centre became more apparent. Complementary public and private investment in this centre will emerge as the economy strengthens and advancing Council's growth and development objectives, as well as lay foundations for a vibrant and successful retail and commercial precinct.

### Council's Strategic Focus

In 2013-14, Council has demonstrably maintained its focus on:

- ▶ **Advocacy for better outcomes** – the completion of the Springvale grade separation being principal among these and grade separations along the entire Dandenong line – all of which will lead to lesser congestion and greater productivity for our business sector.
- ▶ **Securing partnerships in the delivery of community needs** – evidenced by stronger, ongoing relationships with State and Federal agencies in the support of disadvantaged people and newly arrived migrants and refugees.
- ▶ **Commitment to the progressive enhancement of community infrastructure** – with increasingly high levels of capital investment including essential investment in 'renewals' (looking after the infrastructure we already have).

- ▶ **Creating a sound and sustainable financial strategy which ensures operational resourcing and capital investments that satisfy community expectations** – Council is pushing toward a decade of financial sustainability as it records strong and responsible financial outcomes that reflect prudence and sound fiscal management by Council.

### Advocacy

This time last year, I reported on the importance of a referendum to secure greater financial security for local governments. This referendum did not proceed at the November 2013 election, so risks remain regarding the Federal Government's ability to sustain direct funding of local governments. Other spheres of government may dispute that any risk exists, but while there is some degree of risk Council will continue to take any steps that protect the financial integrity of the Council as a corporation.

### Capital Investment

Capital investment was at an unsustainably high level in 2013-14 influenced significantly by the capital cost of construction of the Greater Dandenong Civic Centre. \$63.58 million was expended on all projects in this year of which \$14.67 million was dedicated to asset renewals. It is most important that a properly determined ratio of renewal and refurbishment : total project investment is maintained to ensure that previous infrastructure investments remain at standards that are serviceable and reflect highly on the city. Council monitors this ratio very closely over time.



*It would not be an overstatement to suggest that this Centre – with its Library, state of the art community facilities, civic square, next generational screen, community meeting spaces and commercial rental opportunities – has exceeded all expectations. (John Bennie, CEO)*

Council's capacity to fund this investment grows. This remains a challenge, but difficult decisions continue to be taken that will result in higher operating surpluses and thereby a greater capacity to fund capital improvements.

These challenges include:

- ▶ refining and containing operating expenditure
- ▶ pursuing external grant funds through partnerships and advocacy as outlined above
- ▶ increasing other revenues while maintaining rates at an appropriate level.

This reflects prudent financial management and Council has once again demonstrated its commitment to this core responsibility.

### Sound Financial Management

Council's underlying operating result was a deficit of \$2.70 million. An ongoing challenge to Council's 'bottom line' remains the necessity to contribute to a sector wide and highly conservative Local Authority Defined Benefits Superannuation Scheme – although sound financial management saw obligations met in 2014-15 without any additional increase in rates.

After considering non-operating income and expenditure, the surplus was \$54.54 million.

It is important to note that these surpluses are 'accounting surpluses' which include a range of non-cash items such as depreciation on Council assets, assets written off, assets gifted to Council by developers (eg. roads and footpaths) and exclude cash costs such as capital expenditure.

Council remains in a sound financial position, but moreover, its forward financial projections would forecast this status continuing – subject of course to continuing, prudent management – with a growing capacity to meet the reasonable needs of the community and the ongoing demands of ageing infrastructure that Council will always seek to present to increasingly higher standards of quality.

### Capital Improvements

As stated above, of the \$63.58 million spent on capital improvements during the year, \$14.67 million was on asset renewals with a further \$7.03 million on upgrades to existing infrastructure assets and \$34.39 million on major projects.

The funding of basic infrastructure – roads, footpaths and drains – is always a challenge, but it is pleasing to report that in 2013-14, \$6.17 million was spent on this essential area. This significant investment continues to underpin the importance of Council's maintenance and protection of existing assets.

An extensive list of improvement projects was completed in 2013-14 and these are outlined elsewhere in this report.

2013-14 can be counted as yet another successful year for Council. But with each successful year comes a new challenge – to meet if not exceed community expectations and on this basis, 2014-15 presents as yet another opportunity to serve the people and businesses of Greater Dandenong to the best of our corporate ability.

I thank Council for its leadership and the many wonderful staff who remain committed to local government service within Greater Dandenong City Council.



John Bennie PSM  
**Chief Executive Officer**