

Local council electoral structure review

Preliminary Report

Whittlesea City Council

October 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Wurundjeri and the Taungurung peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it is holding this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The panel acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

Report approval

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| 1 | 17 October 2023 | The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC |
| 1 | 17 October 2023 | Ms Liz Williams PSM |
| 1 | 18 October 2023 | Mr Sven Bluemmel |

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Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive summary | 4 |
| Developing electoral structure models | 4 |
| Electoral structure models..... | 4 |
| Next steps..... | 4 |
| Background | 6 |
| About the 2023–24 electoral structure reviews..... | 6 |
| The electoral representation advisory panel..... | 6 |
| Public engagement | 6 |
| Developing recommendations..... | 7 |
| About Whittlesea City Council | 11 |
| Profile | 11 |
| Current number of councillors and electoral structure | 13 |
| Last electoral structure review..... | 13 |
| Preliminary findings and models | 14 |
| Number of councillors | 14 |
| Electoral structure | 15 |
| Models for public feedback | 19 |
| Ward names | 19 |
| Next steps | 21 |
| Response submissions | 21 |
| Public hearing | 22 |
| Final report..... | 22 |
| References | 23 |
| Appendix 1: Model maps | 24 |

Executive summary

An electoral structure review panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government is reviewing the electoral structure of Whittlesea City Council.

The purpose of the review is to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure, including ward names, for the council.

Under Victoria's *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), Whittlesea City Council must now have a single-councillor ward electoral structure.

The panel is looking at:

- the appropriate number of councillors and wards for the council
- the location of ward boundaries
- appropriate ward names.

This report outlines the preliminary models the panel is presenting for public consultation, for the proposed new electoral structure of Whittlesea City Council to meet the requirements of the Act.

More information about the background to the review is available on [page 6](#).

Developing electoral structure models

The panel considered a range of factors when deciding on the models in this report, including:

- research and analysis
- voter growth or decline over time.

More information on the way the panel decided on the models is available on [page 7](#).

Electoral structure models

After considering research and the requirements of the Act, the panel is presenting the following electoral structure models for public consultation:

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to models 1 and 2.

Details on these models, including maps, are available in [Appendix 1](#).

Next steps

The panel is now seeking feedback on the preliminary electoral structure models. You can make a response submission to the preliminary models until 5 pm Wednesday 15 November 2023. If any response submitters wish to speak at a public hearing, the panel will hold an online

public hearing on Tuesday 21 November. Following this, the panel will present its final recommendation to the Minister on Wednesday 20 December 2023.

More information about the review process is available on the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) website at www.vec.vic.gov.au

Background

About the 2023–24 electoral structure reviews

In October 2022, the Minister for Local Government formed 2 electoral representation advisory panels to review and provide advice on the electoral structures of 39 local councils, under section 16 of the Act. If the Minister accepts the electoral structure recommended by the panel, any changes are expected to take effect at the October 2024 local council elections.

The Act introduced several changes to local government representation, including the types of electoral structures local councils may have. All metropolitan, interface and regional city councils (including Whittlesea City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

For Whittlesea City Council, the panel is examining:

- the number of councillors and wards
- where the ward boundaries should be
- the name of each ward.

The Act requires electoral structures to provide fair and equitable representation and facilitate good governance. Each ward must have an approximately equal number of voters per councillor (within +/-10% of the average). While conducting the review, the panel also notes the role of a councillor as specified under section 28 of the Act.

The electoral representation advisory panel

The panel conducting the electoral structure review of Whittlesea City Council has 3 members:

- The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC (Chairperson)
- Ms Liz Williams PSM
- Electoral Commissioner Mr Sven Bluemmel.

The purpose of the review is to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure, including ward names, for the council. The panel is independent of councils and the VEC.

Under the Act, the VEC is not responsible for reviewing council electoral structures but must provide administrative and technical support to the panel. The Electoral Commissioner (or their nominated representative) must be a member of each panel.

Public engagement

Public information program

On behalf of the panel, the VEC conducts a public information and awareness program to inform the public about the Whittlesea City Council electoral structure review. This includes:

- printed public notices in state-wide newspapers

- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- a media release to announce the start of the review
- information on social media channels
- website content on vec.vic.gov.au, including:
 - current information on the review process
 - fact sheets for each council under review and a submission guide.

Whittlesea City Council was also offered but did not take up 2 optional methods to promote the reviews:

- social media advertisements targeted at the council area
- notifying voters in the council area subscribed to the VEC's VoterAlert service about the start of the review and release of the preliminary report.

Public consultation

The panel now invites input to the electoral structure review of Whittlesea City Council via:

- response submissions to this preliminary report
- an online public hearing for anyone who makes a response submission to speak to the panel and expand on their submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the review process and are considered alongside other factors addressed during the review. These are outlined below.

Developing recommendations

The electoral structure models the panel is presenting in this preliminary report comply with the Act and were developed through careful consideration of:

- research and analysis conducted by the VEC support team, including geospatial and demographic data
- rates or patterns of population and voter change over time, and relevant forecasts of growth or decline based on forecast information provided by .id (informed decisions, a company specialising in demographics and forecasting).

Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows local councils to have between 5 and 12 councillors, but neither the Act nor the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 specify how to determine the appropriate number of councillors. Therefore, the models put forward by the panel in this report are guided by the Act's intention for fairness and equity in voter representation.

In examining the appropriate number of councillors for Whittlesea City Council, the panel considered the following criteria:

- the population and number of voters in the council area, compared to other councils with a similar population size and number of voters in the same category (for example, other comparable metropolitan, interface or regional city councils)
- patterns of population change and voter growth or decline in the council area over time
- the current and past numbers of councillors
- the representation needs of the communities of interest in the council area.

The panel's final recommendation will also consider any matters raised in public response submissions not already listed above.

Local councils with a larger number of voters will often have more councillors. Large populations generally have greater diversity, both in the type and number of communities of interest and issues relating to representation. However, the ideal number of councillors can also be influenced by the circumstances of each council, such as the:

- nature and complexity of services the council provides
- geographic size and topography of the area
- forecast population and voter growth or decline
- social diversity.

Deciding the electoral structure

Under the Act, regional city, metropolitan and interface councils must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

When developing single-councillor ward models for Whittlesea City Council, the panel considered these criteria:

- whether the structure would comply with section 15(2) of the Act (see below), and for how long it would likely comply
- the appropriate number of councillors, as outlined above
- whether meaningful and effective ward boundaries could be established and whether these would be easily identifiable to local communities
- the representation of communities of interest
- the voter distribution and physical features of the area, and the impact these may have on the shape and size of wards
- past elections for the council, including:
 - numbers of candidates nominating
 - incidences of uncontested elections
 - rates of informal voting.

The panel's final recommendation will also consider any matters raised in public response submissions not already listed above.

Under section 15(2) of the Act, subdivided structures must aim for an approximately equal number of voters per councillor in each ward. This means the number of voters represented by each councillor in a ward should be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards.

During this review, the panel aims to recommend a structure that will comply with section 15(2) at the time of the 2024 local council elections and, if possible, also comply based on voter numbers at the time the review is conducted. The panel uses forecasts of population and voter change to assess compliance at the 2024 elections with as much accuracy as possible. In some cases, population change and other factors impacting voter numbers mean it is not possible to create compliant subdivided structures based both on voter numbers that were current at the time of the review and forecast voter numbers. In these instances, the panel prioritises compliance at the 2024 local government elections to ensure each vote will have approximately equal value at the 2024 election.

One of the factors that may impact compliance with section 15(2) is the number of current and forecast voters with ratepayer-based voting entitlements, also known as council-enrolled electors. Voters' rolls include both state-enrolled electors (the majority of the roll) and a smaller number of council-enrolled electors. The Act introduced changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories. The panel will take these changes to the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, into consideration during this review.

Deciding on ward names

The panel takes the following approach to naming wards:

1. The panel retains existing ward names if these are still relevant to the area covered by the ward.
2. When a new name is required, the panel bases this on features such as:
 - places (registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*) in the ward
 - compass directions
 - native flora or fauna.

Use of Aboriginal language

The panel recognises that there should be meaningful consultation with local Aboriginal communities and groups before a ward is named using Aboriginal language. Meaningful consultation is a significant process that the panel is not able to undertake within the timeframes of the current review program.

The panel also recognises that many of the place names in current use across Victoria are based on Aboriginal language. As such, the panel may put forward new ward names using Aboriginal language if:

- it is the name of a place within a ward
- it is currently in common use

and

- the name is registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*.

Unregistered names using Aboriginal language have not been put forward by the panel as new ward names. While the panel supports the adoption of names based on Aboriginal language, this requires appropriate consultation.

Accordingly, for the panel to consider an Aboriginal language ward name that is suggested in a public submission to the review, the name submitted needs to comply with the above guidelines.

About Whittlesea City Council

Profile

Whittlesea City Council is located about 20 km north of central Melbourne and covers an area of 490 km². With an estimated population of 229,396 it is the fifth most populated local government area in Victoria (ABS 2022a). Whittlesea City Council is surrounded by Murrindindi and Mitchell shires to the north, Nillumbik Shire to the east, Hume City to the west, and Darebin and Banyule cities to the south.

The council forms part of Melbourne's peri-urban fringe, consisting of a largely urbanised area in the south extending northwards to mainly rural land in the north. Urban growth has been occurring since the 1950s, with residential developments extending northwards. From 2001 growth accelerated, with the population doubling over 2 decades. Over the next 5 years (2023-28) it will continue to grow at the third fastest rate of all Victorian councils (.id 2023).

The Traditional Custodians of the land in Whittlesea City Council are the Wurundjeri and the Taungurung peoples.

Landscape

In the south of the council area, the more established areas include a mix of significant industry, employment areas, residential communities, educational services, activity centres, and other community uses (DTP 2023). Heading north, the council area takes in new residential communities followed by mainly rural lands, which consists of grazing and rural residential areas. Along the northern boundary are the forested areas of Kinglake National Park and Yan Yean Reservoir, which sit on the north-east edge of the council (DAFF 2023). Merri Creek forms a large part of the western boundary, and the Plenty River is prominent in the south-east. The council area contains numerous parks and reserves supporting a rich diversity of flora and fauna, including Plenty Gorge Park in the south-east.

The council includes established suburbs in the south, such as Thomastown, Lalor and part of Bundoora, more recent and growing suburbs like Epping and South Morang in the centre and rural localities and towns further north, including Whittlesea and Woodstock (.id 2023).

The Western Ring Road runs east-west across the south of the council and the Hume Freeway begins its route in the south-west corner and runs in a northerly direction. Epping and Plenty roads form major north-south thoroughfares, while Childs, McDonalds and Bridge Inn roads provide major east-west connections. Metropolitan train services travel as far north as Mernda.

Community

Between 2001 and 2021 the population grew from 113,784 to 229,396 (ABS 2001, ABS 2022a). Further growth will likely see the population increase to 277,709 by 2028 and 360,692 by 2041 (.id 2023). Residential growth has and continues to occur along 2 major paths: the first in the south-west following the Epping Road corridor north through to Epping, Wollert and Donnybrook; and the second, beginning in the south-east following the Plenty Road corridor with extensive development from South Morang to Mernda and Doreen. Redevelopment in

established suburbs such as Epping, Thomastown and Lalor is also occurring (Whittlesea City Council 2023; .id 2023).

The proportion of the population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is 1.0%, higher than the Greater Melbourne average of 0.7% (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

Family households make up a greater proportion of all private dwellings (79.2%) in the council compared with Greater Melbourne (70.9%) and the percentage of households comprising couples with children (52.8%) and one parent families (16.6%) are also greater (ABS 2022a, 2022b). Houses are typically freestanding (86.4%) with a lower proportion of higher density flats and apartments (2.8%) (ABS 2022a).

The prominence of young families is more evident in some areas. For instance, 85.7% of households in Wollert are family households while over a quarter of its population is aged 30-40 years old and over a fifth is aged under 10 years (ABS 2022c). Mernda and surrounding areas in the east have similar age profiles (ABS 2022d). In contrast, across Greater Melbourne about 16% of people are aged 30-40 and about 12% of people are under 10 years (ABS 2022b).

Home ownership rates are high across the council area. However, in the new suburban areas of Wollert, Donnybrook, Doreen, Mernda and Epping North homes owned with a mortgage range between 50-70% of all households. In the more established suburbs, such as Thomastown, Lalor and Epping, the rate is between 24-31%, while for Greater Melbourne it is 35% (.id 2023).

Cultural diversity is considered high amongst the population of Whittlesea, with 37.5% being born overseas and 51% speaking a language other than English home. Residents recording Australian and English ancestry are comparatively low, at 19.7% and 17.6% respectively, both about 8 percentage points below those of Greater Melbourne (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b). Large cultural groups include Italians, Indians, and Macedonians. In addition to English, the main languages spoken include Arabic, Macedonian, Punjabi, Italian, and Greek (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b). Some suburbs have significantly higher rates of non-English languages spoken. For instance, in Thomastown 71.8% and in Lalor 70.0% of households use a language other than English (ABS 2022e, ABS 2022f).

Median personal and family incomes of council residents in 2021 were about \$100 and \$270 lower respectively than for Greater Melbourne (ABS 2022a, 2022b) There are also parts of the council where disadvantage is high. For instance, some areas in Thomastown and Lalor are ranked as the most disadvantaged in Greater Melbourne (ABS 2023). Income levels are generally lower in these areas also.

Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Whittlesea City Council is currently divided into 3 wards with a total of 11 councillors:

- one ward with 3 councillors (North Ward)
- 2 wards with 4 councillors each (South West and South East wards).



Figure 1: Diagram of current electoral structure of Whittlesea City Council.

There are approximately 170,869 voters in Whittlesea City Council, with an approximate ratio of 15,533 voters per councillor.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on Whittlesea City Council.

Last electoral structure review

A representation review for Whittlesea City Council was scheduled for completion in April 2020. However, the review ceased with the introduction of the *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*, which occurred at about the same time. The final report for the Whittlesea City Council representation review was not published.

The last electoral representation review of Whittlesea City Council was in 2012. The VEC's final recommendation was for Whittlesea City Council to change to 11 councillors elected from 3 wards (2 4-councillor wards and one 3-councillor ward). A subdivision review was conducted prior to the 2016 local government elections to correct ward boundaries affected by rapid changes in enrolment.

Whittlesea City Council was dismissed by an Act of Parliament in March 2020 and consequently no elections were held for the council in October 2020.

Preliminary findings and models

Number of councillors

After taking into consideration the requirements of the Act and the agreed criteria, the panel found 11 councillors to be an appropriate number for Whittlesea City Council.

The panel considered the characteristics of Whittlesea City Council in relation to similar interface councils, including its population, the number and distribution of voters, and the size and geography of the council.

| Similar interface councils to Whittlesea City Council | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Local council | Area (km ²) | Number of voters at 2020 election | Population (2021 Census) | Current total estimate of voters | Number of councillors | Number of voters per councillor |
| Casey City Council* | 397 | n/a | 365,239 | 252,670 | 11 | 22,970 |
| Wyndham City Council* | 542 | 154,404 | 292,011 | 196,938 | 11 | 17,903 |
| Whittlesea City Council* | 490 | n/a | 229,396 | 170,869 | 11 | 15,533 |
| Hume City Council* | 503 | 152,470 | 243,901 | 170,268 | 11 | 15,478 |
| Mornington Peninsula Shire Council* | 727 | 154,651 | 168,948 | 151,741 | 11 | 13,794 |
| Melton City Council* | 528 | 104,010 | 178,960 | 120,696 | 9 | 13,410 |
| Yarra Ranges Shire Council | 2,468 | 117,583 | 156,068 | 117,900 | 9 | 13,100 |
| Cardinia Shire Council | 1,283 | 78,991 | 118,194 | 83,258 | 9 | 9,250 |
| Nillumbik Shire Council | 432 | 48,101 | 62,895 | 47,845 | 7 | 6,835 |

*These local councils are undergoing an electoral structure review during 2023–24.

Maintaining 11 councillors

Whittlesea City Council currently has 170,869 voters represented by 11 councillors and covers an area of 490 km². Other interface councils with a similar number of voters usually also have 11 councillors. Although there are high rates of population growth forecast for the council, comparable councils are growing at a similar or faster rate, given this the panel considers it appropriate for the total number of councillors to remain unchanged.

Electoral structure

To identify the most appropriate electoral structure, various factors were considered. This included the requirements of the Act, the communities of interest in Whittlesea City Council, the appropriateness of ward boundaries and which models offered the best potential for fair and equitable representation and consequently facilitate good governance.

In developing the preliminary models presented in this report, the panel considered a range of models. The strongest 3 models have been put forward for further public comment.

The panel proposes 3 models for the consideration of the Whittlesea City Council community:

- a subdivided electoral structure of 11 single-councillor wards (Model 1)
- a subdivided electoral structure of 11 single-councillor wards, with different ward boundaries to Model 1 (Model 2)
- a subdivided electoral structure of 11 single-councillor wards, with different ward boundaries to models 1 and 2 (Model 3).

Diagrams of the preliminary models are included in [Appendix 1](#).

A single-councillor ward structure with 11 councillors (Model 1)

Under this model, Whittlesea City Council would adopt an 11-ward structure. Each ward would be represented by one councillor, in line with the requirements of the Act.

Model 1 focuses on keeping suburbs together as much as possible, though some compromises were inevitable to ensure a balance of voter numbers across wards. It accommodates the uneven population growth that is occurring across the council.

The panel considered it best for the large rural north to be contained within its own ward. It noted this area of the council, including the Whittlesea township, had a strong local identity and different interests to the more residential and urban areas in the south. However, the rural areas did not have sufficient voters to make a ward and voters from one of the more suburban parts needed to be included. The panel decided the most appropriate area to be included was part of Doreen, which is well connected along Plenty Road. Hazel Glen Drive and Flaxen Hills Road were considered appropriate boundaries and this area would balance out North Ward. The ward also includes the fast-growing Donnybrook, extending as far south as Masons Road and Summerhill Road in the west.

Along the east, 3 stacked wards capture Bundoora, Mill Park and South Morang. Bundoora Ward captures all the suburb but takes in part of the suburb of Mill Park to ensure enough voters are included in the ward. South Morang is mostly contained within one ward, using clear ward boundaries. Further north, Mernda and Painted Hills complete the growth corridor on the eastern side, with the former capturing the residential area of Mernda and the latter most of Doreen.

In the south-west the older suburbs Thomastown and Lalor are neatly contained within wards, which take the same names. Lalor Ward extends to Cooper Street, encompassing the Epping

Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market, which is outside of the suburb itself, but where there are strong connections.

Epping has far too many voters to be contained in the one ward. In Model 1 Epping Ward captures most of the suburb, except for the northern area west of Darebin Creek, and north of O'Herns Road plus a small section to the south of Cooper Street and west of Edgars Road. This gives the ward a horizontal orientation, though the Epping shopping and commercial centre is the focus. Ganbu Gulinj and Kirrip wards cover the remainder of the Epping growth corridor, effectively splitting Wollert mostly in half along a power line. Kirrip Ward takes the eastern section of Wollert, plus parts of Epping, South Morang, Mernda to the south and further east. Ganbu Gulinj Ward covers the western section of Wollert and part of Epping as far south as Cooper Street.

The division of Doreen is the same across the 3 models. Like other models, Model 1 places the fast-growing Donnybrook suburb in the North Ward. Painted Hills Ward is also the same across the 3 models, and it consists of the majority of Doreen, using the Plenty River as a clear boundary. Another common feature of the models is that Epping is split across multiple wards. This is mainly because Epping could not be contained within one ward because the population is too great.

A single-councillor ward structure with 11 councillors (alternative version) (Model 2)

Under this model, Whittlesea City Council would adopt an 11-ward structure. Each ward would be represented by one councillor, in line with the requirements of the Act.

Where possible, Model 2 uses major geographic and other landscape features as boundaries, as these are likely to be recognisable and familiar to residents, which the panel felt to be beneficial.

The North Ward is largely the same as in Model 1, except for the southern boundary which comes as far south as Boundary Road. Painted Hills Ward is the same as in Model 1, with the same division of Doreen. Aside from this, division of the south-eastern part of the council area is significantly different to Model 1. Using Darebin Creek as the western boundary and Plenty Creek as its eastern one, all of the residential parts of Mernda are contained within Mernda Ward. South Morang Ward sits below Mernda and Painted Hills wards and is well contained by strong boundaries on the east. Plenty Gorge Ward in the south-east corner covers some of Mill Park and uses Plenty and Childs roads as strong boundaries. It encompasses the Plenty Valley Shopping Centre, and the north boundary runs through to Gorge Road. In the south Norris Bank Ward has Darebin Creek as a strong western boundary and covers Bundoora and parts of Mill Park.

Epping Ward is more compact than in Model 1 with High Street forming an easily identifiable boundary with Ganbu Gulinj Ward. The ward is more focused towards the eastern part of the suburb. Although High Street provides a strong boundary, it results in parts of the commercial and shopping centre of the suburb being included in the Ganbu Gulinj Ward.

Ganbu Gulinj Ward is large in area and covers most of the Epping activity centre, as well as growth areas to the north-west of Epping and part of Wollert. Kirrip Ward, to the west and north of Epping Ward, uses strong boundaries, but this gives it an unbalanced appearance, narrowing to cover part of Epping in the south and widening to take a section of Wollert north of Harvest Home Road.

Thomastown and Lalor wards are the same as in Model 1.

The wards in Model 2 generally cover no more than 2 suburbs, which the panel considered to be favourable. Only the North Ward, which spans a very large geographical area, and Plenty Gorge Ward, which includes parts of Bundoora, Mill Park, and South Morang, cover more than 2 wards. The panel felt the division of the Epping suburb across 5 wards might be considered a drawback. However, given the size and number of voters in the area, this was difficult to avoid. It was also noted that the Epping section of Lalor was mainly the Wholesale market and the South Morang part the quarry in the north-east of Epping. The panel felt overall this was an appropriate division of Epping given Epping Ward also has a significant commercial and industrial activity centre, which would mostly be maintained in Model 2.

A single-councillor ward structure with 11 councillors (alternative version) (Model 3)

Under this model, Whittlesea City Council would adopt an 11-ward structure. Each ward would be represented by one councillor, in line with the requirements of the Act.

Model 3 largely maintains the boundaries of the current electoral structure, which the panel felt might be more familiar to some residents. The current North Ward is divided roughly into 3 – North, Painted Hills, and Mernda wards. The North Ward in this model covers the council's rural area, extending in the south-east into Doreen using the same boundary as in Models 1 and 2 to separate it from Painted Hills Ward. Mernda Ward extends west beyond the Darebin Creek to include a section of rural land alongside the bulk of residential land in its east. Further south, Wiltonvale Ward captures the eastern part of South Morang and the south-east of Mernda, comprising roughly equal parts of what is in South East and North wards under the current structure.

The current South East Ward has been divided into Plenty Gorge, Norris Bank, and Quarry Hill wards and also takes in the southern half of Wiltonvale Ward. Quarry Hill Ward takes the western part South Morang and includes parts of Mill Park and Epping. In the south-east corner, Plenty Gorge Ward takes in the eastern parts of Mill Park and Bundoora, while Norris Bank Ward includes parts of Bundoora, Mill Park and the eastern areas of Lalor and Thomastown.

The current South West Ward is split into Galada Tamboore, Boori, Kirrip, and Ganbu Gulinj wards. Epping is split across 4 wards and Thomastown is split across 2.

In this model some wards cover parts of multiple suburbs. For instance, Norris Bank Ward covers parts of Bundoora, Mill Park, Thomastown and Lalor. Conversely, some suburbs are split across multiple wards. For example, the suburb Lalor is split across Galada Tamboore, Norris Bank, Boori, and Ganbu Gulinj wards. Mill Park has also been divided, in this case between Plenty Gorge, Norris Bank and Quarry Hill wards. Also, Epping is split across Quarry

Hill, Boori, Ganbu Gulinj, and Kirrip wards, but this is partly because of the size of Epping's population.

Summary

Introducing single-councillor wards represents a large electoral structure change for Whittlesea City Council. Achieving models that divide communities into appropriate wards while also accounting for population growth and ensuring wards comply with the +/-10% requirement can be challenging.

In the case of Whittlesea City Council, the challenges of developing a suitable electoral structure included: a large rural area that does not have sufficient voters to make a single ward; population growth running mostly along 2 distinct corridors; a central and large suburb (Epping), straddling both growth corridors, which must be divided in some form; and areas of concentrated and continued growth, mainly in Wollert and Mernda. The 3 models presented to the public for comment deal with these challenges in particular ways, though with some features in common.

- All 3 models maintain a north ward to cover a large area and include a small part of Doreen to balance voter numbers, though each differs in how far south the northern ward extends.
- The Painted Hills Ward is identical across all 3 models and Lalor and Thomastown wards are the same in models 1 and 2.
- Model 1 has wards stacked from north to south that tend to follow the Plenty Road growth corridor and larger wards following the Epping Road corridor in the west. It attempts to adopt locality boundaries as much as possible and a greater portion of the Epping suburb is contained within the one ward.
- Model 2 has strong boundaries that follow major roads and geographic features. It provides compact wards along the Plenty Road growth corridor, so that Mernda and South Morang are well contained using solid boundaries, while Epping is more focused on the centre of the suburb and the growth of Wollert is divided differently to Model 1.
- Model 3 most closely resembles the existing electoral structure by dividing the current multi-councillor structure into roughly equivalent single-councillor wards. While this provides ward boundaries that residents might be more familiar with, it divides suburbs more so than models 1 and 2.

Models for public feedback

The panel considers all models outlined below to be the single-councillor ward electoral structures with the best potential to offer fair and equitable representation for voters in Whittlesea City Council and consequently facilitate good governance. Please see [Appendix 1](#) for detailed maps of these models.

Model 1

Whittlesea City Council has 11 councillors and is divided into 11 wards with one councillor per ward.

Ward names: Bundoora Ward, Epping Ward, Ganbu Gulinj Ward, Kirrip Ward, Lalor Ward, Mernda Ward, Mill Park Ward, North Ward, Painted Hills Ward, South Morang Ward, Thomastown Ward.

Model 2

Whittlesea City Council has 11 councillors and is divided into 11 wards with one councillor per ward.

Ward names: Epping Ward, Ganbu Gulinj Ward, Kirrip Ward, Lalor Ward, Mernda Ward, Norris Bank Ward, North Ward, Painted Hills Ward, Plenty Gorge Ward, South Morang Ward, Thomastown Ward.

Model 3

Whittlesea City Council has 11 councillors and is divided into 11 wards with one councillor per ward.

Ward names: Boori Ward, Galada Tamboore Ward, Ganbu Gulinj Ward, Kirrip Ward, Mernda Ward, Norris Bank Ward, North Ward, Painted Hills Ward, Plenty Gorge Ward, Quarry Hill Ward, Wiltonvale Ward.

Ward names

The panel has suggested ward names to identify the wards in each model and invites comments from the community on these names as part of submissions responding to the preliminary report. The basis of the ward name recommendations for each model are described below.

Model 1

Bundoora Ward, Epping Ward, Lalor Ward, Mernda Ward, Mill Park Ward, South Morang Ward, and Thomastown Ward names are new and are based on localities.

Ganbu Gulinj Ward and Kirrip Ward are new names and are based on the registered name of built features in the ward.

Painted Hills Ward is new and is based on the registered name of a road found within the ward.

North Ward is the existing name of one ward under the current electoral structure.

Model 2

Norris Bank Ward and Plenty Gorge Ward names are new and are based on the registered names of natural features found within each ward. Epping Ward, Ganbu Gulinj Ward, Kirrip Ward, Lalor Ward, Mernda Ward, North Ward, Painted Hills Ward, South Morang Ward, and Thomastown Ward as above.

Model 3

Boori Ward is new and is based on the registered name of a built feature found within the ward.

Galada Tamboore Ward is new and is based on the registered name of a wetland in the ward.

Quarry Hill Ward is new and is based on the registered name of a quarry in the ward.

Wiltonvale Ward is a new name and is based on the registered name of a creek in that ward.

Ganbu Gulinj Ward, Kirrip Ward, Mernda Ward, Norris Bank Ward, North Ward, Painted Hills Ward, and Plenty Gorge Ward as above.




The panel will review ward name suggestions received during the response submission stage when forming the final advice to the Minister for Local Government on the electoral structure of the council. Suggested ward names should comply with the panel's approach to naming wards (see [Deciding on ward names](#) and [Use of Aboriginal language](#)). All ward name suggestions received during the response submission stage will be provided to the Minister for consideration at the conclusion of the electoral structure review.

Next steps

Response submissions

Any person or group, including the local council under review, can make a response submission to the electoral representation advisory panel. In your submission you should address the models proposed by the panel in this preliminary report.

You can make a submission:

| | |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Online</p> <p>Visit vec.vic.gov.au to make a submission online.</p> <p>You will need to make an account to use the online Public Submission Tool and can save a draft submission to finish later.</p> |
|  | <p>By email</p> <p>Whittlesea.ERAPSubmissions@vec.vic.gov.au</p> |
|  | <p>By post</p> <p>Electoral Representation Advisory Panel c/o Victorian Electoral Commission Level 11, 530 Collins St Melbourne VIC 3000</p> |

The panel must receive all response submissions before 5 pm on Wednesday 15 November 2023. If you post your submission, make sure it has enough time to reach the panel before the deadline. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Required information

For your submission to be considered, you must include your:

- full name
- contact phone number or email address
- postal or residential address.

To protect the integrity and transparency of the review process, the panel will not consider submissions without this information. If you are submitting as a group or organisation, you must include the name of a nominated contact person who is authorised to submit on behalf of your group.

On behalf of the panel, the VEC will handle information provided by submitters in accordance with the privacy policy available at vec.vic.gov.au/privacy

Public access to submissions

To ensure transparency in the electoral structure review process, your submission will be published on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au. The VEC will remove your signature and contact details, including residential and postal addresses, from all public copies but must publish your full name (or group name) and locality (suburb or town).

Please note that any submission content that is potentially defamatory, offensive, obscene or that includes the personal information of people or organisations who are not a party to the submission may also be redacted before publication.

Public hearing

If you make a response submission, you can also ask to speak at an online public hearing to support your submission and expand on your views.

The online public hearing is scheduled for:

Time: 2 pm

Date: Tuesday 21 November 2023

The panel encourages participation in the public hearing. If you wish to speak at the public hearing, you **must** indicate this in your response submission. The public hearing will not be held if there are no requests to speak.

Anyone can attend a public hearing, but you will only be able to speak if you asked to in your response submission. If you ask to speak, the VEC will contact you to arrange a time for you to speak at the hearing. You will have 10 minutes to address the public hearing panel, which will include at least 2 of the review panel members. The members of the public hearing panel may ask you questions.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on public hearings.

Final report

Following the public hearing, the review panel will consider all evidence gathered and prepare a final report for the Minister for Local Government containing a recommendation for the number of councillors and the electoral structure for the local council.

The final report is scheduled to be provided to the Minister on Wednesday 20 December 2023. The Minister will consider the final reports, including any determination to make the reports publicly available. Any change to the electoral structure of Whittlesea City Council following on from this review is expected to apply at the October 2024 local council elections. Under the Act, the final council electoral structure will be set by an Order in Council published in the Victoria Government Gazette.

References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2001), [2001 Census All Persons QuickStats, Whittlesea \(LGA\)](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022a) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Whittlesea \(LGA\)](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022b) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Greater Melbourne](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022c) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Wollert](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022d) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Mernda](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022e) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Thomastown](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022f) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Lalor](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2023) [Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), Australia, Suburbs and Localities, Indexes, SEIFA 2021](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (2021) [Catchment scale land use profile dashboard – Local government areas](#), DAFF, accessed 28 August 2023.
- DTP (Department of Transport and Planning) (2023), [Whittlesea planning scheme](#), DTP, accessed 29 August 2023.
- Electoral Act 2002 (Vic)
- Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (Vic)
- .id (informed decisions) (2023) [City of Whittlesea](#), .id, accessed 29 August 2023.
- Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)
- Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)
- Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)
- Whittlesea City Council (2023) [Suburbs and residents](#), Whittlesea City Council, accessed 29 August 2023.

Appendix 1: Model maps

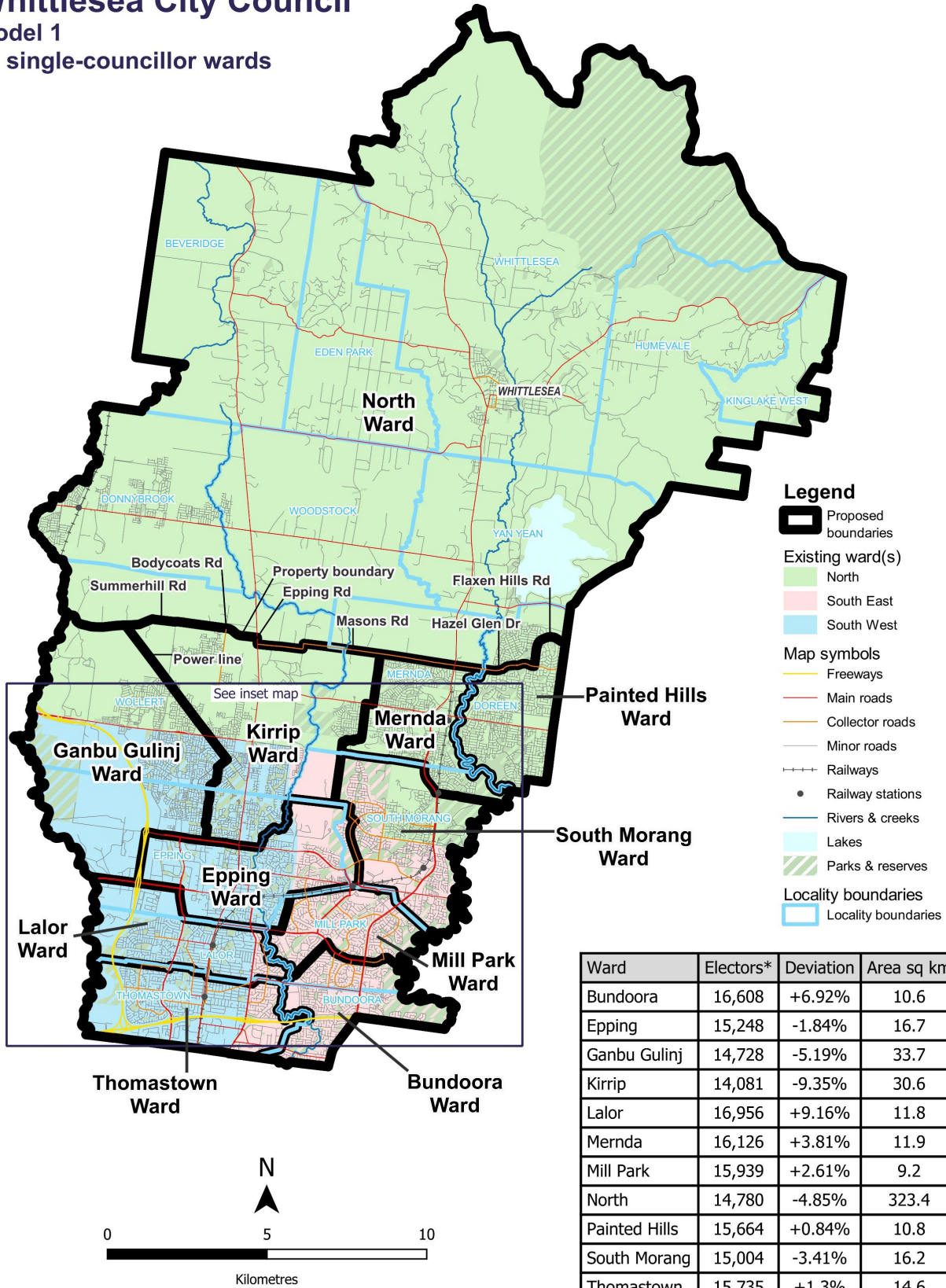
The following maps are included in this report:

| Map | Page |
|---|------|
| Model 1 – a single-councillor ward structure with 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward. | 25 |
| Model 2 – a single-councillor ward structure with 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward (with boundaries different to Model 1). | 28 |
| Model 3 – a single-councillor ward structure with 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward (with boundaries different to models 1 and 2). | 31 |

Whittlesea City Council

Model 1

11 single-councillor wards

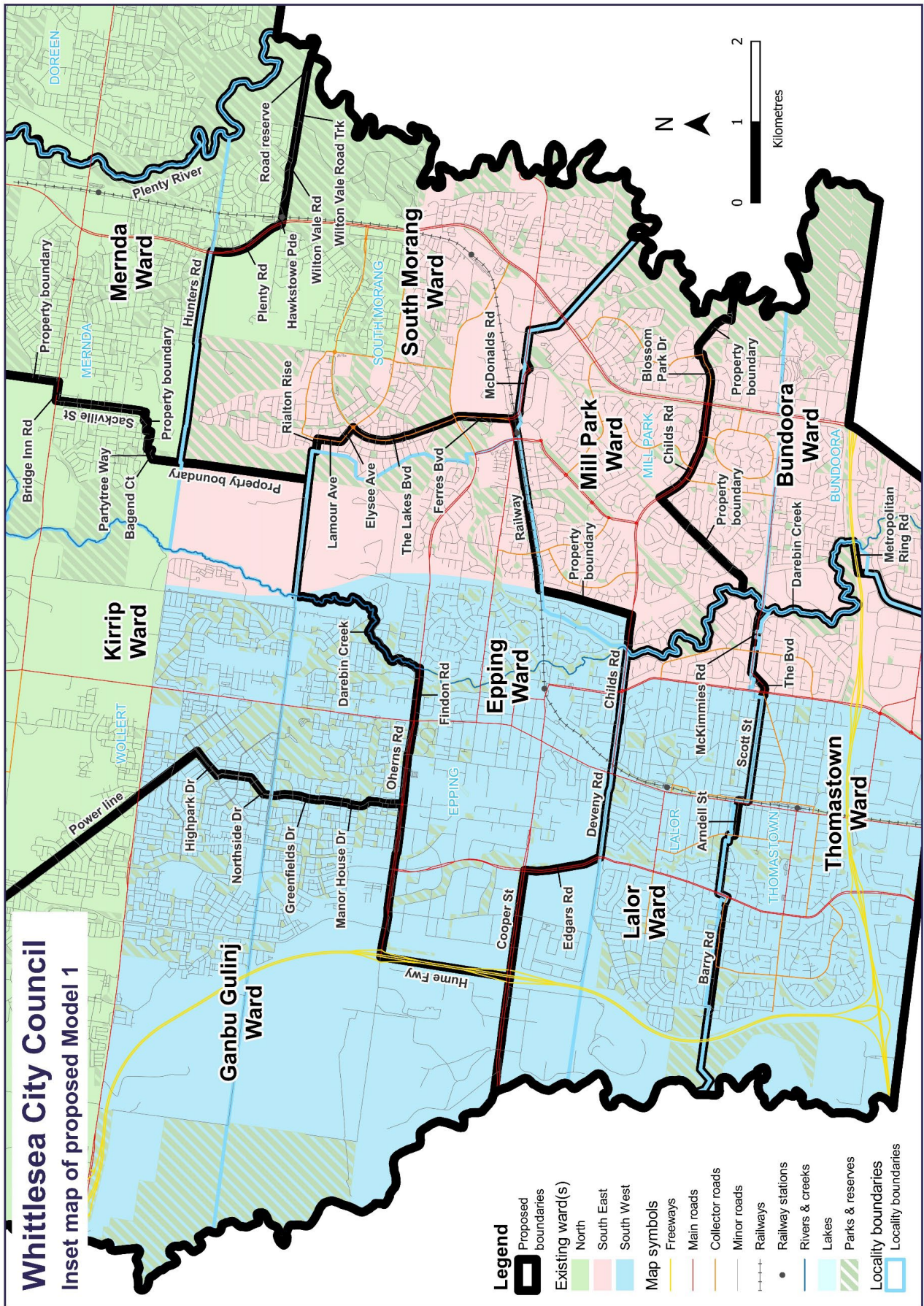


| Ward | Electors* | Deviation | Area sq km |
|----------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Bundoora | 16,608 | +6.92% | 10.6 |
| Epping | 15,248 | -1.84% | 16.7 |
| Ganbu Gulinj | 14,728 | -5.19% | 33.7 |
| Kirrip | 14,081 | -9.35% | 30.6 |
| Lalor | 16,956 | +9.16% | 11.8 |
| Mernda | 16,126 | +3.81% | 11.9 |
| Mill Park | 15,939 | +2.61% | 9.2 |
| North | 14,780 | -4.85% | 323.4 |
| Painted Hills | 15,664 | +0.84% | 10.8 |
| South Morang | 15,004 | -3.41% | 16.2 |
| Thomastown | 15,735 | +1.3% | 14.6 |
| Total | 170,869 | | 489.5 |
| Average | 15,534 | | 45 |

*Elector numbers as at 25 July 2023

Data use: Layers for alignment: © State of Victoria (Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)

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Data for Model 1

| Ward | Electors* | Deviation | Area# (square km) |
|----------------|----------------|------------|----------------------|
| Bundoora | 16,608 | +6.92% | 10.6 |
| Epping | 15,248 | -1.84% | 16.7 |
| Ganbu Gulinj | 14,728 | -5.19% | 33.7 |
| Kirrip | 14,081 | -9.35% | 30.6 |
| Lalor | 16,956 | +9.16% | 11.8 |
| Mernda | 16,126 | +3.81% | 11.9 |
| Mill Park | 15,939 | +2.61% | 9.2 |
| North | 14,780 | -4.85% | 323.4 |
| Painted Hills | 15,664 | +0.84% | 10.8 |
| South Morang | 15,004 | -3.41% | 16.2 |
| Thomastown | 15,735 | +1.3% | 14.6 |
| Total | 170,869 | n/a | 489.5 |
| Average | 15,534 | n/a | 45 |

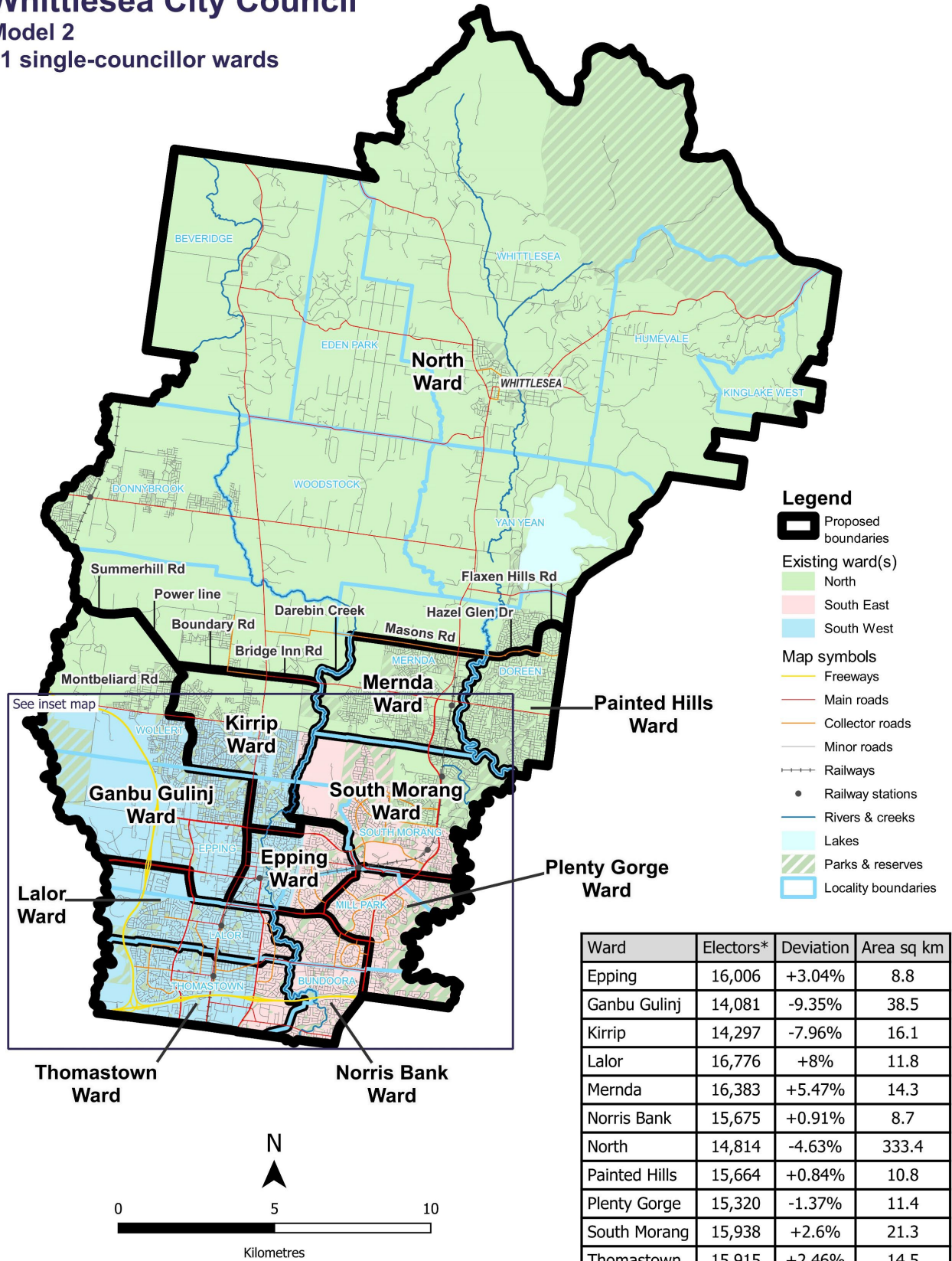
*Voter numbers as at Tuesday 25 July 2023.

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (e.g. ABS).

Whittlesea City Council

Model 2

11 single-councillor wards



| Ward | Electors* | Deviation | Area sq km |
|----------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Epping | 16,006 | +3.04% | 8.8 |
| Ganbu Gulinj | 14,081 | -9.35% | 38.5 |
| Kirrip | 14,297 | -7.96% | 16.1 |
| Lalor | 16,776 | +8% | 11.8 |
| Mernda | 16,383 | +5.47% | 14.3 |
| Norris Bank | 15,675 | +0.91% | 8.7 |
| North | 14,814 | -4.63% | 333.4 |
| Painted Hills | 15,664 | +0.84% | 10.8 |
| Plenty Gorge | 15,320 | -1.37% | 11.4 |
| South Morang | 15,938 | +2.6% | 21.3 |
| Thomastown | 15,915 | +2.46% | 14.5 |
| Total | 170,869 | | 489.6 |
| Average | 15,534 | | 45 |

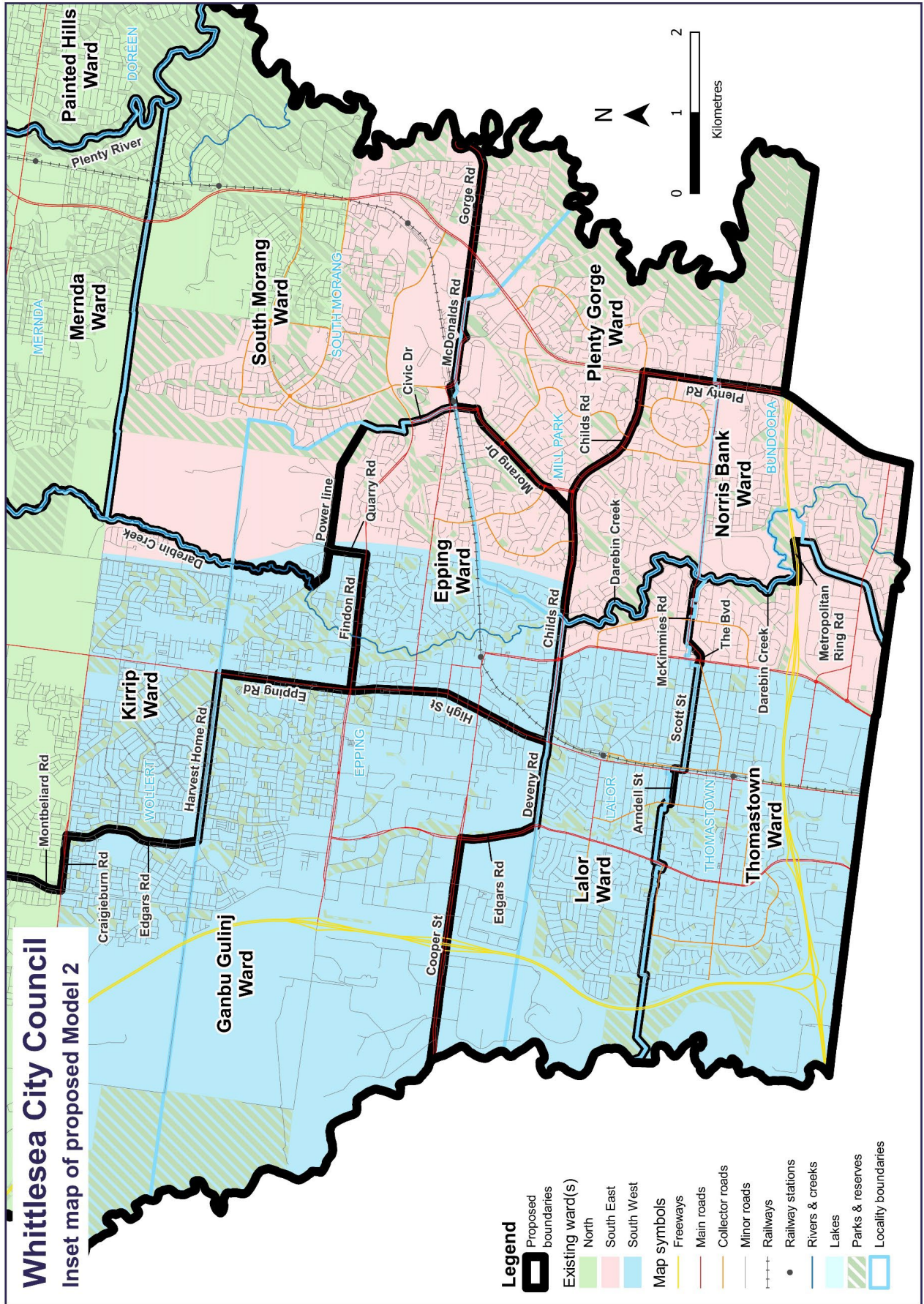
*Elector numbers as at 25 July 2023

Data use:



Layers for alignment:
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Data for Model 2

| Ward | Electors* | Deviation | Area# (square km) |
|----------------|----------------|------------|----------------------|
| Epping | 16,006 | +3.04% | 8.8 |
| Ganbu Gulinj | 14,081 | -9.35% | 38.5 |
| Kirrip | 14,297 | -7.96% | 16.1 |
| Lalor | 16,776 | +8% | 11.8 |
| Mernda | 16,383 | +5.47% | 14.3 |
| Norris Bank | 15,675 | +0.91% | 8.7 |
| North | 14,814 | -4.63% | 333.4 |
| Painted Hills | 15,664 | +0.84% | 10.8 |
| Plenty Gorge | 15,320 | -1.37% | 11.4 |
| South Morang | 15,938 | +2.6% | 21.3 |
| Thomastown | 15,915 | +2.46% | 14.5 |
| Total | 170,869 | n/a | 489.6 |
| Average | 15,534 | n/a | 45 |

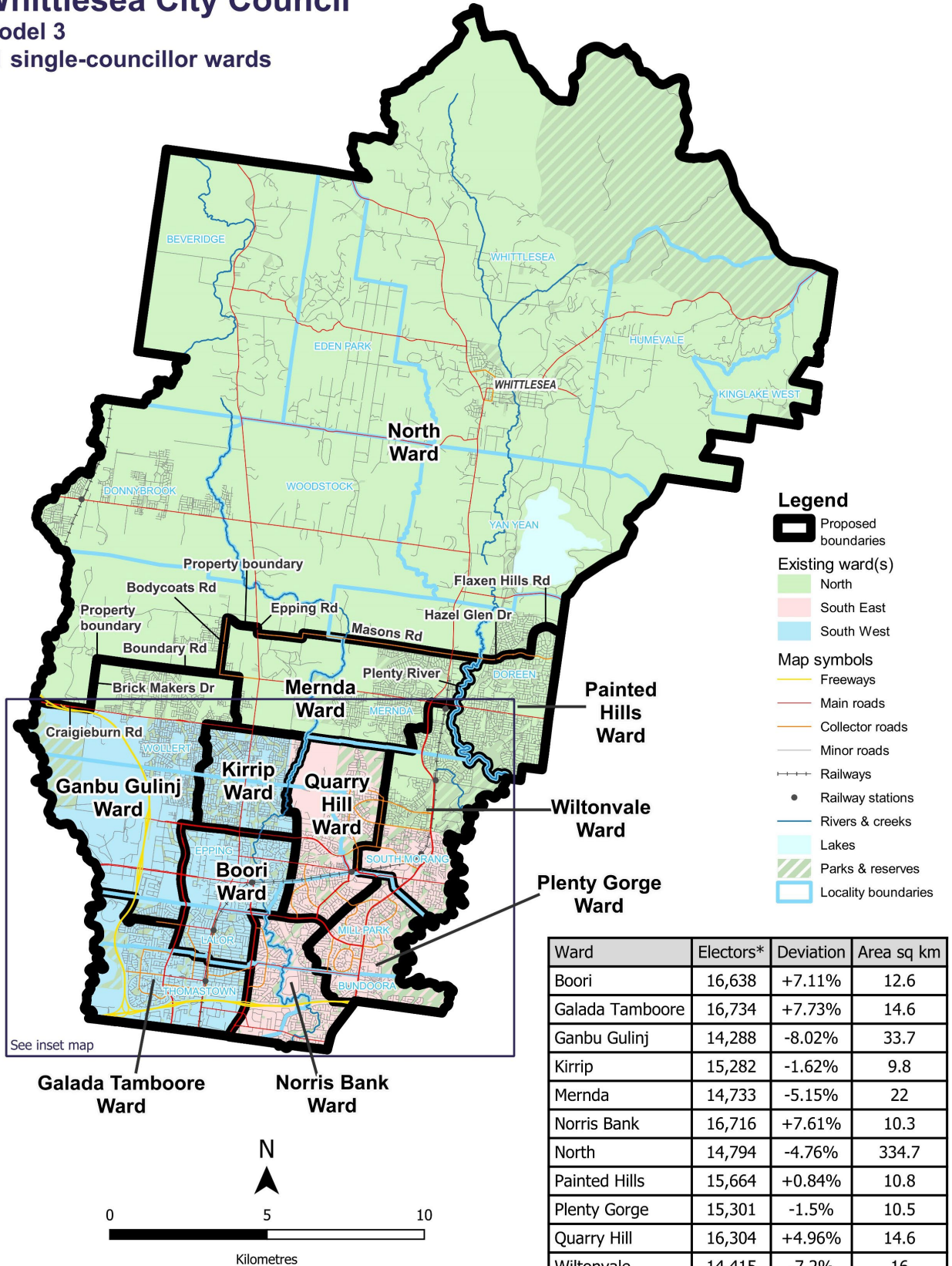
*Voter numbers as Tuesday 25 July 2023.

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (e.g. ABS).

Whittlesea City Council

Model 3

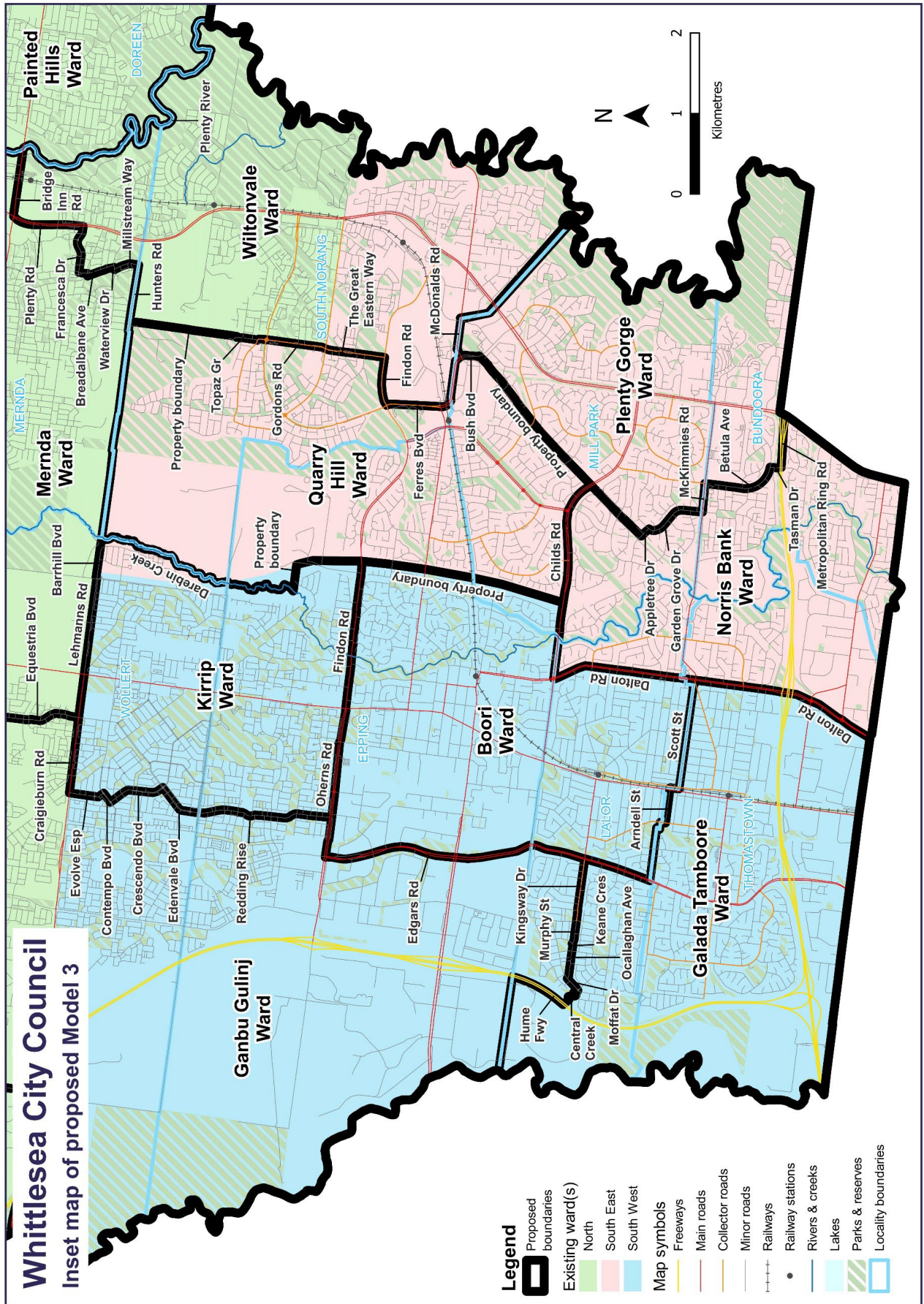
11 single-councillor wards



Data use:
 Layers for alignment:
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*Elector numbers as at 25 July 2023



Data for Model 3

| Ward | Electors* | Deviation | Area# (square km) |
|-----------------|----------------|------------|----------------------|
| Boori | 16,638 | +7.11% | 12.6 |
| Galada Tamboore | 16,734 | +7.73% | 14.6 |
| Ganbu Gulinj | 14,288 | -8.02% | 33.7 |
| Kirrip | 15,282 | -1.62% | 9.8 |
| Mernda | 14,733 | -5.15% | 22 |
| Norris Bank | 16,716 | +7.61% | 10.3 |
| North | 14,794 | -4.76% | 334.7 |
| Painted Hills | 15,664 | +0.84% | 10.8 |
| Plenty Gorge | 15,301 | -1.5% | 10.5 |
| Quarry Hill | 16,304 | +4.96% | 14.6 |
| Wiltonvale | 14,415 | -7.2% | 16 |
| Total | 170,869 | n/a | 489.6 |
| Average | 15,534 | n/a | 45 |

*Voter numbers as Tuesday 25 July 2023.

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (e.g. ABS).

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