Central Coburg Road Map

1. Purpose

The Central Coburg Road Map is a guide to implementation of the Central Coburg Framework.

2. Background / context

Central Coburg framework plan – a long-term view

Council has set a long-term vision to revitalise central Coburg using its own landholdings. This builds on decades of previous work and community engagement.

Council's long-term intent is for a thriving and welcoming town centre in Coburg – retaining Coburg's unique character. Anchored by a new library, piazza and community space, central Coburg will have strong community life, activation, jobs, and creative spaces. A framework plan sets out the vision which will be delivered in stages over the next 10-20 years.

Central Coburg remains a long term civic and economic priority. While Council's vision remains strong, current market conditions make immediate conventional development more difficult, but they also create a window for Council to further shape and curate the precinct.

Subdued market conditions

The Australian development market is currently subdued, with elevated construction and financing costs, labour shortages and weaker investor demand affecting the feasibility of many commercial and residential projects. Despite strong underlying demand for housing, industry research indicates that a significant proportion of approved developments are not proceeding, creating an opportunity to focus on planning, partnerships and project readiness until market conditions improve.[1]

3. Central Coburg Road Map

The Central Coburg Road Map (the Road Map) is summarised in Figure 1.

The Central Coburg Road Map provides a pathway for implementing the Central Coburg Framework while responding to current market conditions and maintaining momentum across the precinct. The Road Map is designed to unlock site potential, support future investment, and create opportunities for economic development, housing, community infrastructure and place activation. Rather than committing Council to a single delivery approach, it establishes a clear program of work to investigate options, develop business cases and inform future Council decisions.

The proposed Road Map comprises 3 complementary streams.

First, existing Council-led investments and enabling public works that will catalyse the precinct, improve amenity, reduce development risk and prepare key sites for future development.

Second, exploration of Community Wealth Building opportunities that may retain selected sites in community ownership or stewardship, delivering long-term public value through outcomes such as

[1] Charter Keck Cramer's State of the Market H1 2026.

affordable housing, affordable commercial and creative spaces, and other community benefits (refer section 5 of this report).

Third, development of business cases and market-facing opportunities to support traditional private sector investment and development when market conditions are favourable (refer section 6 of this report).

Importantly, the Road Map aims to make the precinct more attractive to private developers as we achieve outcomes from the first and second streams. It also seeks to maintain community control of the community outcomes and benefits – which can be compromised when integrated into market led solutions.

Together, these streams are intended to create a more attractive and investment-ready precinct, while ensuring Council retains flexibility to pursue the delivery models that best achieve community outcomes. Individual projects, funding commitments and land use decisions would continue to be subject to future Council consideration and approval.

Figure 1: Central Coburg Road Map

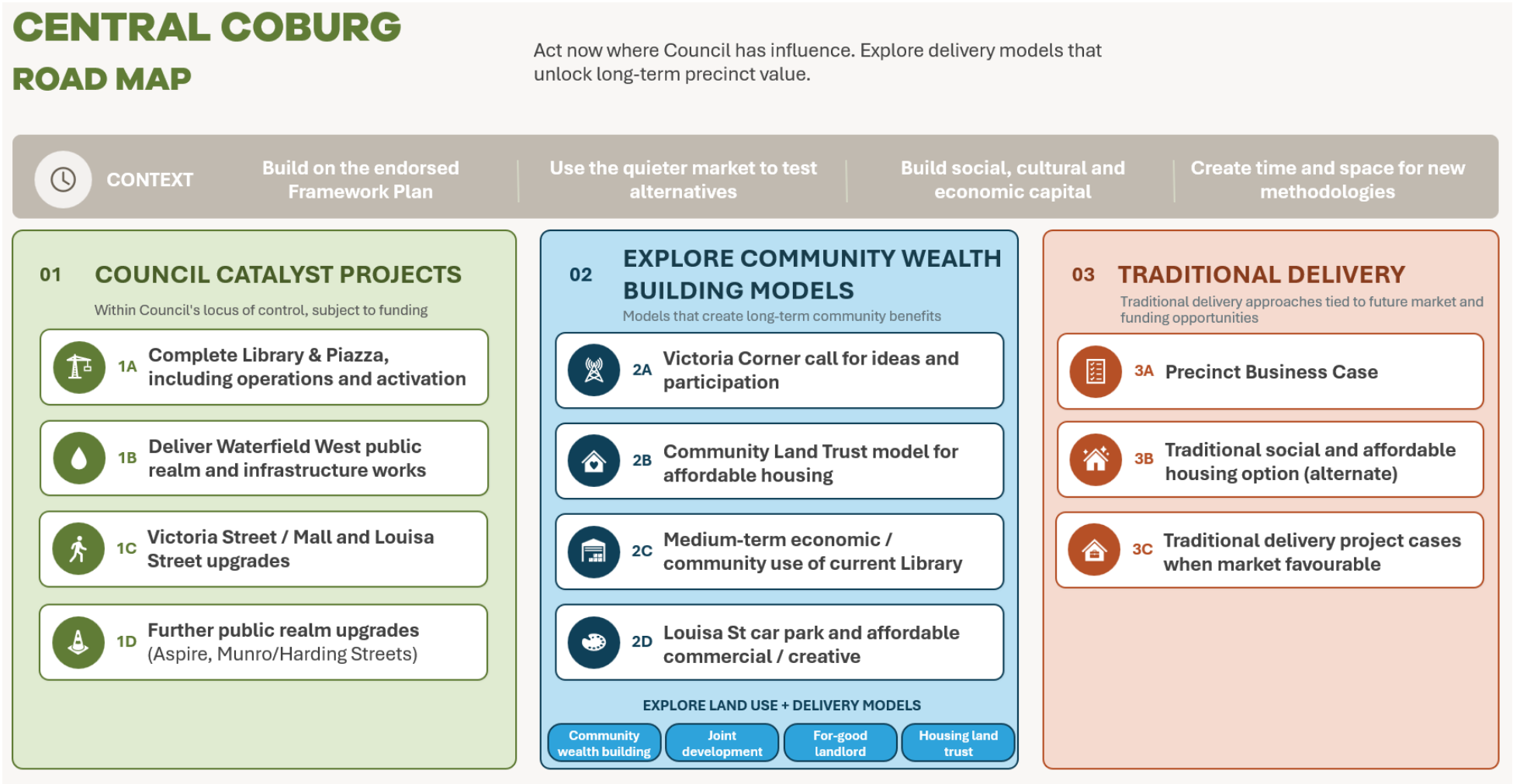
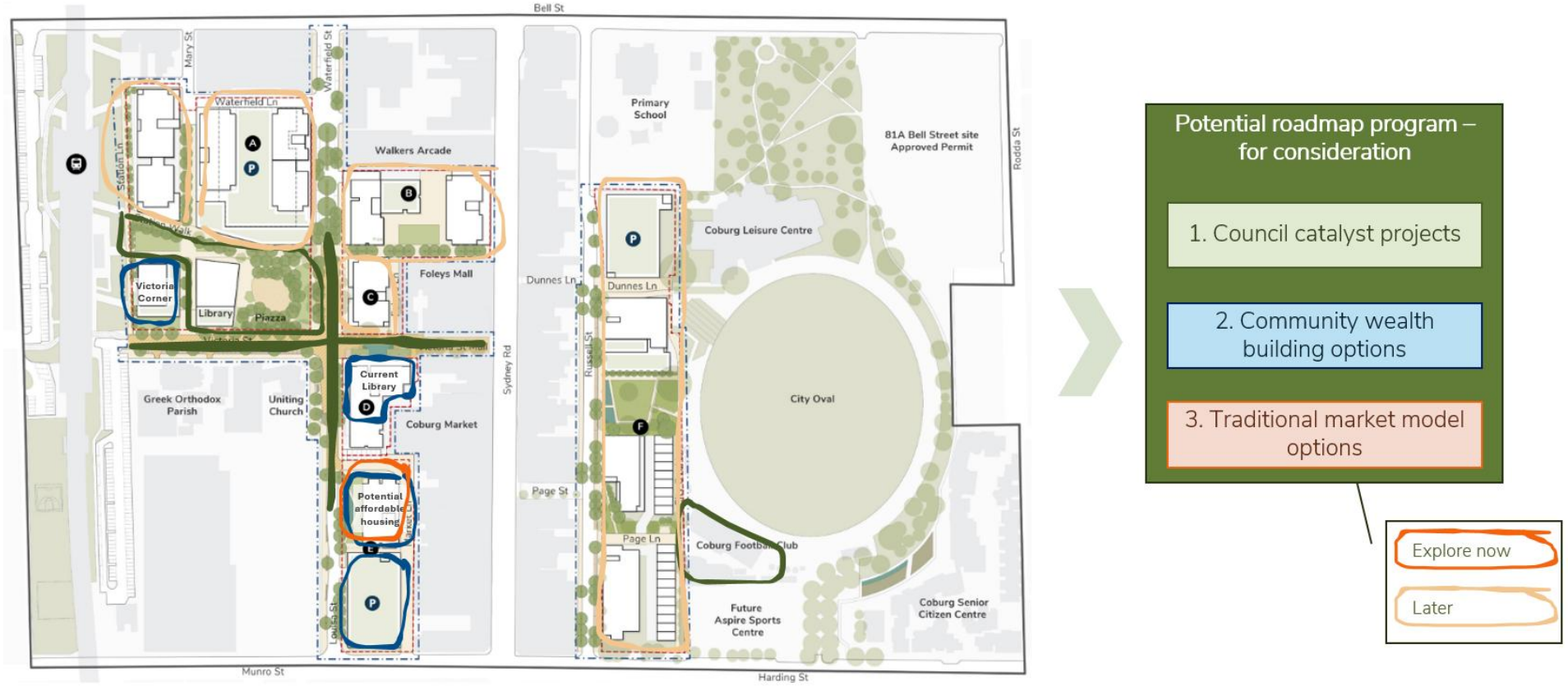


Figure 2: Conceptual map of sites where different types of delivery might be explored (explanation over the coming pages).



4. Council's investment to catalyse the precinct

A number of projects are already in train for delivery, as part of Council's capital works program. This is the first stream which relates to existing Council-led investments.

These works are important for two reasons. Some will serve to catalyse the precinct and bring community, activation, identity and value to the area. Others will help to prepare the way to make the rest of the precinct more attractive for future development – attracting better land prices and value at future delivery stages.

The program includes:

i. The **Library and Piazza**. Design is well underway to ensure this new facility meets the needs of our diverse community. The Library and Piazza will be the civic and social heart of the new precinct and Council is planning to ensure the new spaces are highly activated, connected, welcoming and programmed throughout the year. Like other successful cultural destinations around the world, Coburg Library and Piazza will help drive foot traffic, support local businesses, strengthen community connection and increase the attractiveness and value of surrounding development opportunities, making future investment and redevelopment across the precinct more viable.

i. **Public realm upgrades** to precinct drainage, public realm, and interim car parking, to deliver the library and piazza and facilitate future development. Almost $7 million has been budgeted in the capital works program to undertake a first stage of this work. It includes drainage infrastructure for the library and piazza (which will support delivery of the entire Waterfield West precinct), delivery of the Station Triangle open space, Mary Walk and Station Walk, and an interim upgrade to the Waterfield West carpark that will create parking capacity to stage future works.

ii. **Potential public realm** upgrades which will connect the Aspire centre (adjoining Site F) to the precinct and City Oval. The Aspire project has attracted $21 million in federal and state grants and will bring significant activation and community benefit to the precinct – and is also expected to deliver public realm upgrades.

iii. The adjacent **Munro and Harding Street Streets for People upgrade** is in train. A concept design for the Streets for People upgrades to Munro and Harding Street is currently out for community engagement. Funding of $1.4m is budgeted for this project, to be delivered over the next two years.

iv. Upgrades to **Victoria Street and Victoria Mall**, as well as a future upgrade to **Louisa Street**, are considered in the forward program but may be sequenced at a later time.

v. Broader service planning and engagement around **community festivals**, **third spaces for young people**, as well as **creative and cultural** programming.

5. Community Wealth Building models

"Community Wealth Building" approaches are delivery models that use land, assets, partnerships and investment to create long-term community benefits over time (and potentially in perpetuity). Rather than maximising immediate financial return, these models retain and recycle value locally through outcomes such as affordable housing, economic opportunity, cultural activity and community access, while remaining financially sustainable.[2]

These models can also contribute to the life and vibrancy of a precinct. They offset the gentrification effect that often occurs when major development occurs – bringing a unique community character to the area. They should be pursued where there is a robust analysis that demonstrates they can deliver public

[2] Refer also: Community Wealth Building — The Democracy Collaborative
Publications – Community Wealth Building: What will it take?

value that is not likely to be achieved through conventional market delivery – and where governance, financial and delivery risks are understood and more commonly used.

There are a range of examples, but at their heart Community Wealth Building models use Council land and partnerships to create assets that are owned by Council and/or the community and continue generating community benefit long after construction is complete. They can also leverage resources from multiple sources – achieving greater financial sustainability than traditional government or commercial models.

It is important to acknowledge that Community Wealth Building models are generally much more complex to deliver than traditional market-led delivery, and they do take effort, resources and commitment over the long-term. However, done well, these models can achieve something enduring and special – well beyond what the market can deliver. They also tend to achieve very distinctive and deliberately curated outcomes – helping to shape the long-term character of the surrounding precinct.

Illustrative examples of Community Wealth Building models include:

- Bryant Park in New York, where community leaders (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation) established the Bryant Park Corporation (BPC), a private, not-for-profit management company, to renovate and operate a previously unsafe and badly dilapidated park on behalf of the City of New York. Established in 1980 the park attracts high visitation and has generated significant economic activity in the surrounding area over nearly five decades. The BPC also has a special rate and charge scheme, as well as attracting other income.
- BRUDI in Brunswick, where a former school (Crown land, for which Council is the Committee of Management) is leased at a subsidised rate by a specialist social-impact property fund (Ethical Property Australia) to support start-ups and mission-aligned tenants. BRUDI currently supports around 30 businesses and 200 jobs – with a further building to be refurbished.
- Multi-use community hubs and precincts such as the Abbotsford Convent (Melbourne, Australia) or the Bok Building (Philadelphia, USA). The Bok Building is a nine-storey Art Deco former vocational high school transformed into a thriving creative and community hub. The Bok houses over 200 small businesses, artists, makers, non-profits, and entrepreneurs, including woodworkers, jewellers, ceramicists, a preschool, and ESL classes. It also features popular communal spaces, including a rooftop Bok Bar and restaurant spaces. The Abbotsford Convent precinct is managed as a not-for-profit site, and features 11 historic buildings housing over 100 artist studios, galleries, cafes, a radio station (3MBS), and schools like Sophia Mundi Steiner School.
- Another variant of community wealth models is Community Land Trusts. CLTs are a model of long-term affordable housing. A not-for-profit holds land in trust for the long-term. Residents own or lease the homes that are built on it, but do not own (or pay for) the land. The trust retains ownership of the land and applies resale or occupancy conditions that preserve affordability over time. The model balances individual housing security with enduring community benefit – preventing land value gains from being captured through private ownership. CLTs therefore make housing more affordable while retaining public land. They have been delivered in the US and Europe; a first Australian project is currently in its early stages – with a Trust established and land committed by Bellingen Shire.

In Central Coburg, we don't need every site to be a Community Wealth Building project. However, one or two catalytic projects are proposed to help achieve exceptional and unique long-term outcomes in Central Coburg. In a softened commercial market, Council has an opportunity to explore and develop some Community Wealth Building concepts. They could assist Council to realise housing and / or creative / commercial / community service floor space that may otherwise struggle to compete in a market led solution.

The Road Map proposes that Council develops a Discussion Paper that considers potential Community Wealth Building initiatives including:

i. Exploring potential Community Wealth Building sites and partners within the precinct. This work will help to understand interest from local and broader community organisations, and partnership opportunities. At this stage, potential sites for further exploration include:

   a. the Victoria Corner (Site A1),

   b. current Coburg Library building at Site D, and

   c. parking precinct at the southern end of Louisa Street. (A multi-deck paid carpark could also offset the inclusion of some affordable commercial and creative spaces within the building).

ii. Exploring a Community Land Trust model as a possible vehicle for long-term affordable housing. Site E on Louisa Street could potentially be an excellent site to explore the CLT model. NB: It is also proposed that a more traditional Community Housing Provider model be explored under traditional delivery models for social and affordable housing – with the potential for both projects to proceed, if the business cases are strong.

As noted, Community Wealth Building initiatives can be much more complex to deliver than traditional market developments. They are likely to take longer to initiate, design and develop – and will require sustained focus and investment from Council over the long term. However, they can deliver outstanding economic, social and activation outcomes for the community.

A project scoping and feasibility analysis of these opportunities will be developed and presented to Council for further consideration through a Discussion Paper in the first half of 2027. This may incorporate feedback from the Victoria Corner call for ideas and partnerships, and will include consideration of the potential timeframes and investment profile for different sites and models.

6. Traditional delivery

Council may determine that some sites are best suited to straightforward market delivery, with minimal additional requirements or constraints on their development. This could provide an opportunity to generate stronger financial returns from land sales to help offset the costs or lower financial returns associated with Community Wealth Building projects. The Road Map therefore contemplates a mix of delivery approaches across the precinct, rather than all sites being expected to deliver the same balance of community and financial outcomes.

A precinct business case based on traditional delivery models for Central Coburg is close to finalisation. It recognises the Library and Piazza as the precinct's catalyst project, with its activation and operation playing a critical role in attracting people, supporting economic activity and unlocking the value of surrounding sites.

The precinct business case will create a template for future project-based business cases, which will be developed as market conditions become suitable (as set out in the precinct business case).

The first project business case is proposed to be for a social and affordable housing development following a traditional delivery model. Anticipating that future federal funding streams are likely, there is benefit to developing a traditional social and affordable housing business case over the next year. This work might be done in partnership with a Community Housing Provider. *As noted above, this would be done separately from the CLT model – with the potential that one or both models could proceed should the business cases be strong.*

The timing of the next traditional delivery project business case (after the social and affordable housing business case) will be dependent on market conditions but could logically begin while the library and piazza are in construction.

An important consideration for project business cases will be the extent to which Council might specify or constrain the development that occurs on market development sites. Council's development standards seek good built form and design outcomes, but more flexibility on specific site outcomes may be worth considering. Decisions about traditional delivery models for individual sites will need to consider the

outcomes sought across the precinct as a whole, including the potential for financial returns from some sites to support other precinct investments.

7. Next steps

Council will keep progressing the long-term Central Coburg vision while introducing more innovative approaches and adapting delivery to current market conditions.

Short term

Indicative timelines and next steps are outlined below. These may evolve as the Road Map develops.

1. October 2026: Road Map presented to Council for decision, tabling the forward work program, including the Waterfield West upgrade project, to enable design and some delivery to be completed prior to the library works (which begin mid-2028).
2. October 2026: begin exploring Community Wealth Building models, with a discussion paper prepared for Council in the first half of 2027. This work may include community and prospective partner engagement to understand interest from local and broader community organisations, and partnership opportunities.

   At this stage, potential sites for further exploration include:

   i. Victoria Corner (Site A1),

   ii. The current Coburg Library building at Site D, and

   iii. The parking precinct at the southern end of Louisa Street. (A multi-deck paid carpark could also offset the inclusion of some affordable commercial and creative spaces within the building).

   This work will also explore a Community Land Trust model as a possible vehicle for long-term affordable housing, potentially on Site E on Louisa Street.
3. October-November 2026: completion of the traditional delivery Precinct Business Case and commencement of a project business case for a traditional model social and affordance housing project, potentially on Site C (or Site E).

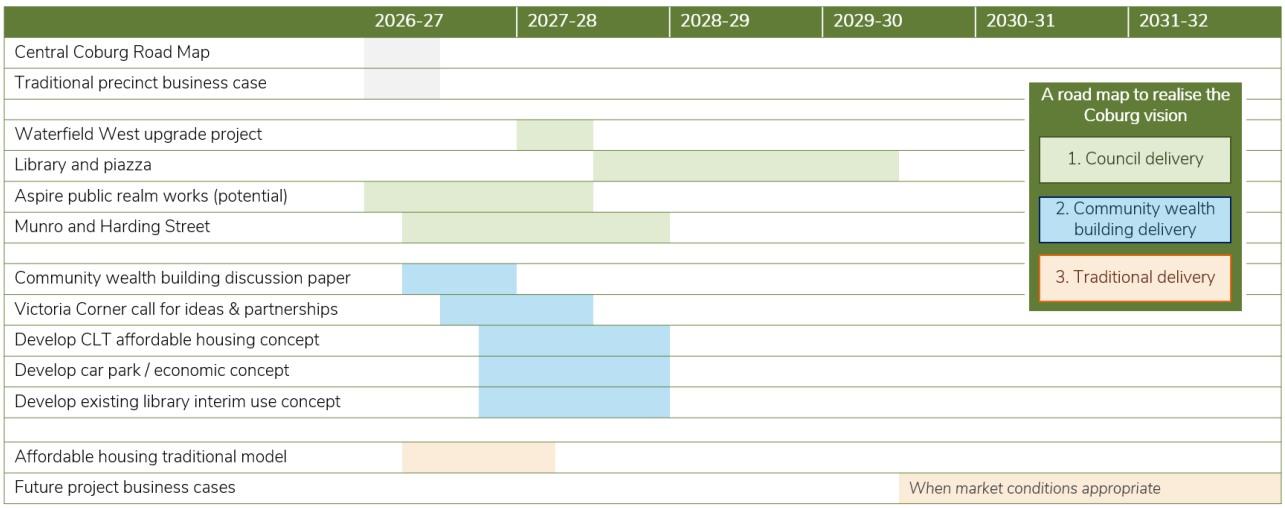
   Further economic modelling will occur through future business cases to understand how some sites may be developed for market only outcomes to support the lower financial returns from Community Wealth Building initiatives.
4. In early 2027: commence the Victoria Corner call for ideas and partnerships, with a report back to Council considering next steps later in 2027.
5. These actions complement other work already in train including:

   a. Discussions with the Bachar Houli Foundation about potential public realm works around the future Aspire centre.

   b. Progressing towards delivery of the Library and Piazza project, including detailed design work, and future service and activation plan.

Medium term program

An indicative medium-term program is illustrated in the timeline below.


2026-27
2027-28
2028-29
2029-30
2030-31
2031-32
Central Coburg Road Map
Traditional precinct business case
Waterfield West upgrade project
Library and piazza
Aspire public realm works (potential)
Munro and Harding Street
Community wealth building discussion paper
Victoria Corner call for ideas & partnerships
Develop CLT affordable housing concept
Develop car park / economic concept
Develop existing library interim use concept
Affordable housing traditional model
Future project business cases
When market conditions appropriate
A road map to realise the Coburg vision
1. Council delivery
2. Community wealth building delivery
3. Traditional delivery