

THE CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

GEELONG WATERFRONT MASTER PLAN

Guiding the future of the Djilang Waterfront

Draft
August 2025

We acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the land, waterways and skies. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of our Greater Geelong community today.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation for their guidance, cultural leadership, and generosity in sharing stories that have enriched our understanding of the waterfront's deep cultural significance. We value this partnership and look forward to continuing to grow and learn together.

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01 INTRODUCTION



The Geelong Waterfront is one of the city's most valued public assets, offering a unique mix of recreation, culture, and economic activity. This Waterfront master plan sets out a clear vision for its future, ensuring it remains vibrant, accessible, and resilient while balancing environmental, social, and economic priorities.

Since the major public realm improvements between 1996 and 2000, the waterfront has flourished as a key destination. However, increasing visitation and events and environmental challenges from the coastal environment are placing pressures on the precinct and highlight the need to renew and upgrade infrastructure to respond to evolving community needs. Current major projects such as the Geelong Yacht Club expansion, Geelong Safe Harbour project, and the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre will further increase waterfront visitation and reinforces the need for coordinated investment and long-term planning.

We jointly manage the waterfront with the Victorian Government and leaseholders responsible for commercial operations, tourism attractions, and events. This master plan provides a framework for the next phase of renewal, ensuring public spaces are enhanced, connections between Central Geelong and the waterfront are strengthened, and management responsibilities are aligned. By prioritising design excellence, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability, the plan secures the waterfront's role as a dynamic and valued part of Greater Geelong.

1.1 2011 MASTER PLAN: SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR A RENEWED VISION

This document will replace the *Central Geelong Waterfront Masterplan 2011*, which was a review and update of the *Waterfront Design and Development Code 1996 (the Code)*. The 2011 master plan aimed to refine the waterfront's development while addressing emerging challenges. It built on existing successes of the Code and directed efforts toward key improvements.

2011 master plan successes:

- Wangim Walk has been a major success, providing a publicly accessible wave attenuator that significantly enhances public access and offers unique views over Corio Bay. Named after the Wadawurrung word for 'boomerang', this structure also serves to protect the Royal Geelong Yacht Club's marina by mitigating wave impact, thereby improving safety and capacity for vessels.
- The Nyaal Banyul Convention Geelong Convention and Event Centre is now under construction and set to open in 2026, delivering a major civic and economic anchor with high-quality public space, improved streetscapes, and stronger connections between the waterfront and city centre. The project reflects successful collaboration between the local, state and federal governments, supporting local businesses, tourism, and future investment in the precinct.
- Royal Geelong Yacht Club upgrades are underway and expected to be completed by mid-2025. The project includes a new clubhouse, Victorian Sailing School complex, and upgrades to surrounding public areas, improving access, safety, and opportunities for sailing education and community use.
- New ferry services to Melbourne and Portarlington enhance water transport connectivity.

The following challenges and unmet objectives remain:

- Coordinating upgrade or renewal works with the conservation of heritage elements, presents an ongoing challenge.
- Incomplete pathways and accessibility limitations hinder continuous connectivity along the waterfront.
- Rising construction costs have limited budget for renewal or upgrade projects.
- The connectivity, commercial, and community offerings at Western Beach are currently underutilised, presenting an opportunity to develop a comprehensive precinct plan.
- Mineral spa and wellness centre plans have yet to materialise.
- Cunningham Pier has unmet potential for greater tourism attraction including as base for cruise ships.
- The Stage 2 Expansion of the Youth Activity Area, including viewing terraces and climbing walls, has not been executed.
- Efforts to transform Fisherman's Basin into a vibrant maritime and tourism hub remain incomplete.
- Some sections of the waterfront experience increased pressure from events, leading to greater wear and tear, higher maintenance requirements and disruptions to day to day use.
- Critical infrastructure improvements, such as sea wall enhancements and climate-resilient planting, remain pending.

Given the evolving needs of the waterfront and lessons learned from the *2011 Geelong Waterfront Master Plan*, a new master plan is necessary to:

- Address ongoing and emerging challenges.
- Refine and update the vision for the area.
- Guide future development and management in a sustainable and unified manner.



02 THE WATERFRONT: PAST AND PRESENT

2.1 WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY

The Geelong Waterfront is an important part of Wadawurrung Country, within the broader cultural landscape of Djilang. For over 45,000 years, the Wadawurrung People have lived in deep connection with the land and water, guided by Bundjil, the Karringalibil Murrup (Creator Spirit), and Waa (the crow), the protector. The waterways, wetlands, and grassy plains sustained a thriving community, providing food, resources, and trade networks. Landmarks such as Wurdi Youang (the You Yangs), Kunawarra (Lake Connewarre), and the Moorabool and Barwon Rivers remain significant, carrying the stories, language, and ancestral presence of the Wadawurrung People.

Djilang, meaning 'Tongue of Land' in Wadawurrung language, reflects the area's unique coastal geography where the land extends into Corio Bay. The rich natural resources of this Country supported Wadawurrung communities, enabling a sustainable way of life that respected the balance of the environment. Many place names in the region, such as Geelong (Djilang), Mooroolbull (Moorabool), and Kunuwarra (Connewarre), originate from Wadawurrung language, reflecting the enduring connection between people and place.

The waterfront has long held cultural and historical significance to the Wadawurrung people. For thousands of years, this area has been a vital hub for fishing, hunting, and gathering, with its natural resources providing sustenance and spiritual connection. It has also served as a key meeting place where the Wadawurrung people, alongside neighbouring groups, shared food, exchanged knowledge,

and reinforced cultural ties. These gatherings facilitated trade and strengthened relationships between communities. As the region develops, it is essential to honour the Wadawurrung people's ongoing cultural practices and ensure that future projects respect and preserve their connection to the waterfront.

2.2 EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

The arrival of European settlers in the 1830s brought rapid and lasting changes to the Geelong Waterfront.

European colonisation led to extensive land clearing for farming, grazing, and urban expansion. Wetlands were drained, waterways were altered or filled, and introduced species replaced native vegetation. Industrial development and port infrastructure reshaped Corio Bay, with dredging and reclamation works disrupting natural coastal processes and impacting water quality. Sealing, whaling, and gold mining further transformed the landscape, leaving lasting environmental scars.

By the mid-19th century, much of the original natural environment had been altered, replaced by jetties, piers, and wharves that supported Geelong's growth as a trade and industrial hub. Built form still tends to be a dominant feature the waterfront, predominately on the southern perimeter with open space tending to be confined to the coastal fringe.

In addition to its industrial and port-related past, Geelong Waterfront holds important layers of recreational and civic heritage. Eastern Beach, developed in the 1930s as part of a major public works program, remains a much-loved destination for swimming, picnics, and community gatherings. Its Art Deco boardwalk, sea baths, and landscape terraces reflect a long-standing civic investment in public leisure along the bay. More recently, Jan Mitchell's iconic Baywalk Bollards have added to the cultural richness of the area, celebrating Geelong's diverse histories and characters in a uniquely engaging way.



2.3 HISTORICAL TIMELINE

45,000 years ago

For at least 45,000 years, the Country now known as the City of Greater Geelong was the land of the Wadawurrung Aboriginal people. The name of this language group traditionally means the people who belong to the water, in reference to the rivers, creeks, lagoons and other water sources within Wadawurrung Country

Wadawurrung Country originally extended over approximately 7800 km², taking in the Bellarine Peninsula and west towards the Otway forests and north boundaries to Mount Emu and Mount Misery, extending to Lake Burrumbeet, Beaufort and the Ballarat goldfields, and north of the Werribee River



Eugene Van Guerard, View of Geelong, 1856.

1803

Djilang is the traditional Wadawurrung name for Tongue of Land. The name **Geelong** was named in 1837 by Governor Richard Burke



C Grimes, Port Phillip, 1803.

1830



Eugene Van Guerard, Geelong, c. 1830.

1835



Map of Part of New Holland showing the Territory of Geelong and Dutigalla, 1835

1836

Sandbar from Pt Henry to Pt Lillias prevents ships entering Geelong. All alight at Pt Henry and travel to Geelong via small boats known as Lighters

Part of map of Geelong, HWH Smythe, 1838

1838

Initial township and Western Gully



1838

Passenger steamers (Bay Steamer Service) commences operation from Melbourne to Geelong

Lime kilns established for building

Geelong Public bathing House/Jackson & Rays Baths (1838 - 1855)

1840

Suburban allotments for sale

First shipment of wool leaves for London. Wool industry (broking, sales & storage) established

Western Gully, the Corio Bay and the beginnings of Geelong



S. Mossman, Geelong in 1840: the beginnings of two important Victorian towns, 1840.

1841 - 1842

Campaign to import labourers from the United Kingdom

Immigration of Swiss vigneron

Waterfront's Central Precinct from the Geelong township with sheoak trees in foreground



Charles Norton, Geelong 1842, 1842

1845

Corio Bay Bathing Establishment, Geelong Sea Bathing Company and Geelong Public Bathing House (1845 - 1927)

1848



George Gilbert, Limeburners point, 1848.

1848

Shortages in local labour caused the European settlers to bring in Chinese, Malay and Indian workers from Singapore

Geelong declared a free-warehousing port. Imports no longer had to be cleared by customs in Melbourne first

1849

German immigrants arrive

1850

The township has grown exponentially by 1850. There is now a jetty and sea bathing complex on the foreshore



G.A. Gilbert, Geelong Bay looking towards Mt. Martha Ranges, 1850



Robert Hoddle, Geelong, 1850

1850

View of the Central Precinct looking east from the Western Precinct



Stringer, Mason & Co. Lithographers, Corio Bay 1850, 1850

1851

Gold rush commences and many leave Geelong bound for Ballarat

1852



Wadawurrung group with Billy (Willema Ba Ni Ip), Jerry (Dan Dan Nook) and Harry

1853



John William Harwick Corio Bay & the You Yang Mountains from Victoria Terrace, 1853

Labour shortages in the region as a result of the gold rush

Most flora and fauna eradicated from area. Wadawurrung people dispossession

1854

Geelong becomes the official port for exportation of gold

1854



Eugene Von Guerard, Aborigines met on the road to the diggings, 1854.

1855

Geelong Sea Bathing Company Ladies Baths (1855 - 1927)

Shipbuilding established at Rippleside, constructing large shipping vessels

Railway Wharf constructed to move coal from ships to storage at Railway Station to support passenger steamer industry, railway & households



Locations of wharfs on the Geelong foreshore in 1854. Left to right: Moorabool Wharf, Steampacket Wharf, Yarra Street Wharf & Queens Wharf. Source: J.H. Taylor, Map of Geelong, Surveyor-General's Department, Melbourne, 1854

1856

Western Beach Seabathing Company Baths (1856 - 1874)

1857

Western Beach Sea Bathing Company Baths #2 (1857 - 1927)

Melbourne to Geelong railway line established

1860

Waterfront's Central Precinct view from Geelong's township



H. Winkles & H. Bibby, Geelong, c.1860.

1860

Creation of Eastern Park and the Geelong Botanical Gardens

1862

South Channel cut through Pt Henry sandbar, opening up the port to large ships

Geelong to Ballarat railway line established



Geelong Harbour (Eastern baths) showing Singapore Terrace, n.d., pre 1862.

1864

Second Railway Wharf constructed to accommodate huge export trade (coal, wool & grain)

1870

Tourism begins to boom with the opening of mineral springs in Clifton Springs and seaside towns on the Bellarine

Victoria Baths and Western Beach Sea Bathing Company Baths #3 (1870 - 1935)

Goldrush peters out. Many move to Geelong for work

1874

Geelong to Colac and Warrnambool railway line established

1879

Corio Bay Rowing Club established in central waterfront

1880

Fisherman's Boat Harbour and Fisherman's Jetty - Fishing

Andersons Bathing House (1880 - 1928)

1884

Mineral Springs opened (The springs were declared unfit for human consumption and closed down in 1959. A new bore was drilled in 1999).

1885

Central Geelong seawalls constructed to reclaim land

1889

Lime burning discontinued due to pollution

1889 - 1896

Depression

1893

Hopetoun Channel completed, enabling ships to enter Corio Bay



Anon, Railway Pier, c.1910

1900

A power station erected, coal-powered

Transvaal Square Commemoration

1905

Corio Quay South opens

1910

Limeburners Jetty: Recreational Fishing (1910 - 1942)

St Helens Jetty, Swimming Pool, Baths and Boatshed (1910 - 1966)



Anon, Moorabool Street Wharf, c.1910

1912



Geelong Progress Association, Portion of Plan of Geelong & Suburbs, Shrimpton & Strong, Geelong, c.1910



Moorabool Pier Buildings, West & North Elevations, H. Thacker lithographer, Geelong, c.1912

1913

Joy Ark opens (1913 - 1927)



Geelong tram service commences



Melbourne C. Railway, Dec - 1910

1914 - 1918

World War I

1916-1920



Anon, The winning racing crew at the Geelong Yacht Club regatta, 1916

Anon, Geelong Yacht Club, c.1920



Anon, A greasy pole competition at the Geelong Yacht Club regatta, 1916



Geelong tram No. 2 at the Wharf terminus, c.1920

Woods Jetty/Glenleith Avenue Jetty (1916 - 1959)

1920 Tourism boom following the war  Charles Daniel Pratt View from Geelong Gas Works North Geelong looking south-east, 1923  Anon, Port Phillip From Eastern Beach, Geelong, Victoria, c. 1925	1925 Corio Quay North No.1 opens for meat & coal import/export  Charles Daniel Pratt, Geelong Harbour and Waterfront, 1926	1929 Great Depression (1929 - 1938) Rippleside Baths Complex (1929 - 1960)	1930 Construction of Eastern Beach seawall 1932 Construction of Western Beach seawall   Anon, Visit to Geelong March 32 - Beach Park Corio Bay, 1932  Anon Eastern Beach, Geelong, Victoria, 1935	1935  Trompf, Percy & Victorian Railways, issuing body & F.W. Niven & Co., printer. Take a Kodak, 1935			
1938 Moorabool and Gheringhap Streets as central links to the Railway Pier (Cunningham Pier), Moorabool Street Wharf, the Customs House and early developments of the Waterfront  Pratt, Charles Daniel, and Airspy. Geelong, 1938	1939 World War II starts Corio Quay North No.2 opens for grain export  Anon, art of City of Geelong, Parish of Corio, County of Grant - Dept. of Lands and Survey, 1940	1939 The Fountain, Eastern Beach  Anon, The Fountain, Eastern Beach, c.1940	1942 Competition with rail and motorcars see closure of passenger steamer services 1945 World War II ends 1947 Mass immigration from Europe after the war, facilitating large growth in manufacturing in Geelong	1947 A Tourist Map locating in the Waterfront the presence of: St Helens Swimming Pool, Hutton's Wharf, Rippleside Beach & Park, Fishermans Gully, Rippleside Jetty, Glenleith Jetty, Western Beach, Railway Wharf, Moorabool St Wharf, Yarra St Wharf, Stony Pier, Yacht Club Pier, Eastern Beach Swimming Enclosure, Parkside Swimming Pool, Limeburners Point, Eastern Park  Anon, Tourist map, 1947			
1956 Geelong tram service ceases 1962 All Victorian Aboriginal people are given voting rights for the first time 1970 European immigration decreases 1975 Railway Pier ceases to be used for the shipment of goods	1976 Wathaurong Aboriginal Corporation was incorporated under The Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 to act on behalf of and represent the interests of all Wadawurrung People 1977 The Wurdi Youang stone arrangement on Wadawurrung lands is declared a protected archaeological site  Wurdi Youang (You Yangs), Rockwell	1978 Ballarat rail line closes to passengers 1979 The wool industry (broking, sales & storage) comes to an end	1980 Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative is formally registered 1982 The High Court rejected the doctrine of Terra Nullius and concluded that consequently Native Title could have survived on lands where it had not been extinguished	1999 Bore drilled to reinstate mineral springs (35 metres down to reach the pure water in the under ground spring and hand pump fitted) 1980 Cunningham Pier renovated with restaurant at end (now closed and used as carpark)	2000 Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management & Protection Development Planning Protocol agreed between City of Greater Geelong and the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative 2001 City of Greater Geelong agrees to archaeological examinations for all development within 500 metres of the ocean, bays or waterways in order to protect Aboriginal sites	2005 William Buckley Discovery Trail launched 2008 Statement of commitment to partnership with the Wadawurrung by the City of Greater Geelong 2008 City of Greater Geelong endorses the apology made to the Stolen Generations by Prime Minister Rudd	2005 Wathaurong Aboriginal Corporation (WAC), trading as Wadawurrung, was accorded Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) status 2019 Passenger ferry service to Melbourne opened 2025 Construction of Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre on Western Beach Road

2.4 CITY OF GREATER GEELONG TODAY

Geelong is a vibrant, rapidly growing city, home to a diverse economy that includes sectors like advanced manufacturing, education, health, and tourism. Its north-facing waterfront location is a major draw, with the city attracting over 5 million visitors each year, contributing significantly to its thriving \$1.5 billion visitor economy.

To accommodate its expanding population, Geelong is focused on sustainable growth, with state government housing targets planning for 128,600 new homes by 2051. Infrastructure improvements are a priority, including the Regional Rail Revival program to enhance Geelong's rail services, along with ongoing upgrades to roads and cycle routes.

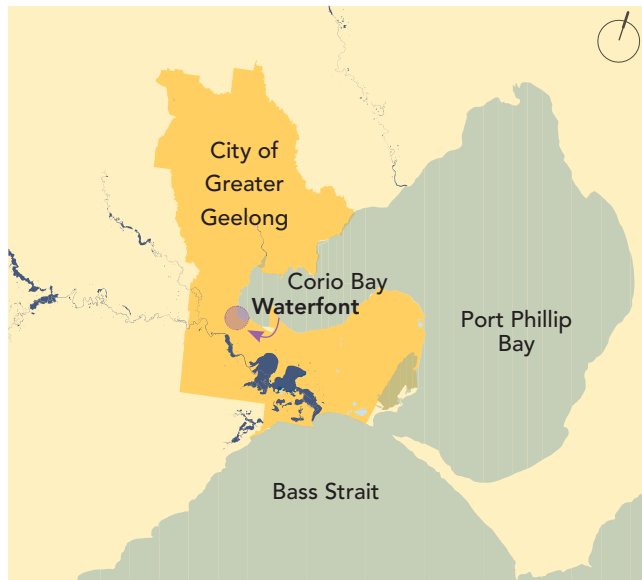


Figure 1. Context map

Key public and private projects are reshaping the city. The \$500 million *Geelong City Deal Implementation Plan* is supporting the revitalisation of the city centre, promoting tourism, and encouraging economic development through infrastructure and cultural initiatives.

Geelong holds the status of a major events hub, with large-scale events like the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race, Sails on the Bay at the Geelong Festival of Sails, Geelong Revival Motoring Festival, AFL matches, and local festivals attracting visitors from across the region.



2.5 CENTRAL GEELONG

Central Geelong is a walkable hub located on the western edge of Corio Bay. Its grid-based street layout provides easy navigation, with north-south streets offering scenic views of the bay, reinforcing the city's strong connection to the waterfront.

The city's character blends historic and modern architecture, with iconic landmarks such as City Hall, the Geelong Library & Heritage Centre, Deakin University, and the Wurriki Nyal Civic Precinct. These established buildings are complemented by new developments, including the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, along with new hotels, commercial and residential towers, and mixed-use spaces that are contributing to a growing and diverse population.

Geelong's waterfront is at the heart of its identity, with popular spaces like Eastern Beach Reserve drawing locals and visitors alike. The Royal Geelong Yacht Club's redevelopment is enhancing the area's water recreation activities. New opportunities for waterfront improvements fronting the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre offer the potential to further strengthen the connection between the city and the bay, and extend activity to the western end of the waterfront.

As Geelong continues to evolve, the master plan will ensure the waterfront remains a core asset, accessible, sustainable, and aligned with the city's evolving identity.

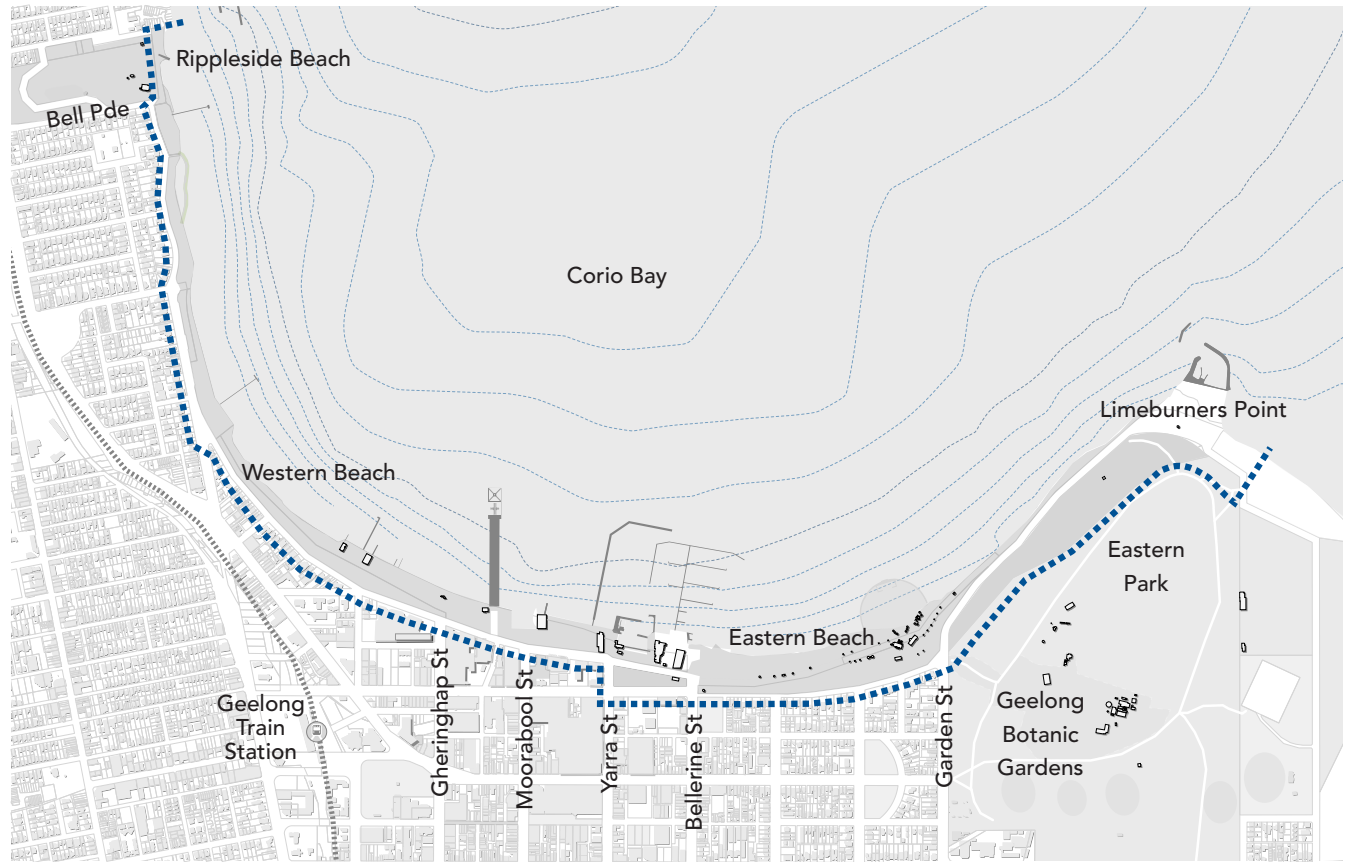


Figure 2. Study Area

03 THE OPPORTUNITY

DEFINING THE VISION

Already a vibrant, inclusive, and accessible destination loved by locals and visitors alike, the waterfront is the heart of the city.

Building on its rich heritage and creative spirit, the waterfront will continue to evolve—strengthening connections to Corio Bay and cementing the city's place as a thriving regional capital.

This transformation will set new benchmarks in urban design, sustainability, and placemaking, delivering exceptional public spaces and new opportunities for culture, business, and recreation.

Honouring the past and looking boldly to the future, the renewed waterfront will be a legacy for generations.

OUTLINING THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The design principles translate the draft master plan's vision into clear priorities, shaping future investment and decision-making. They respond to environmental challenges, community aspirations, and economic opportunities, ensuring the waterfront remains connected, inclusive, and vibrant. Each principle is supported by key objectives that guide the future design and delivery of the master plan.



Figure 3. 'A Vision for the Waterfront' - Artist impression

3.1 CONNECTIVITY AND MOVEMENT

Enhance movement and connectivity across the waterfront to create accessible, continuous, and sustainable connections.

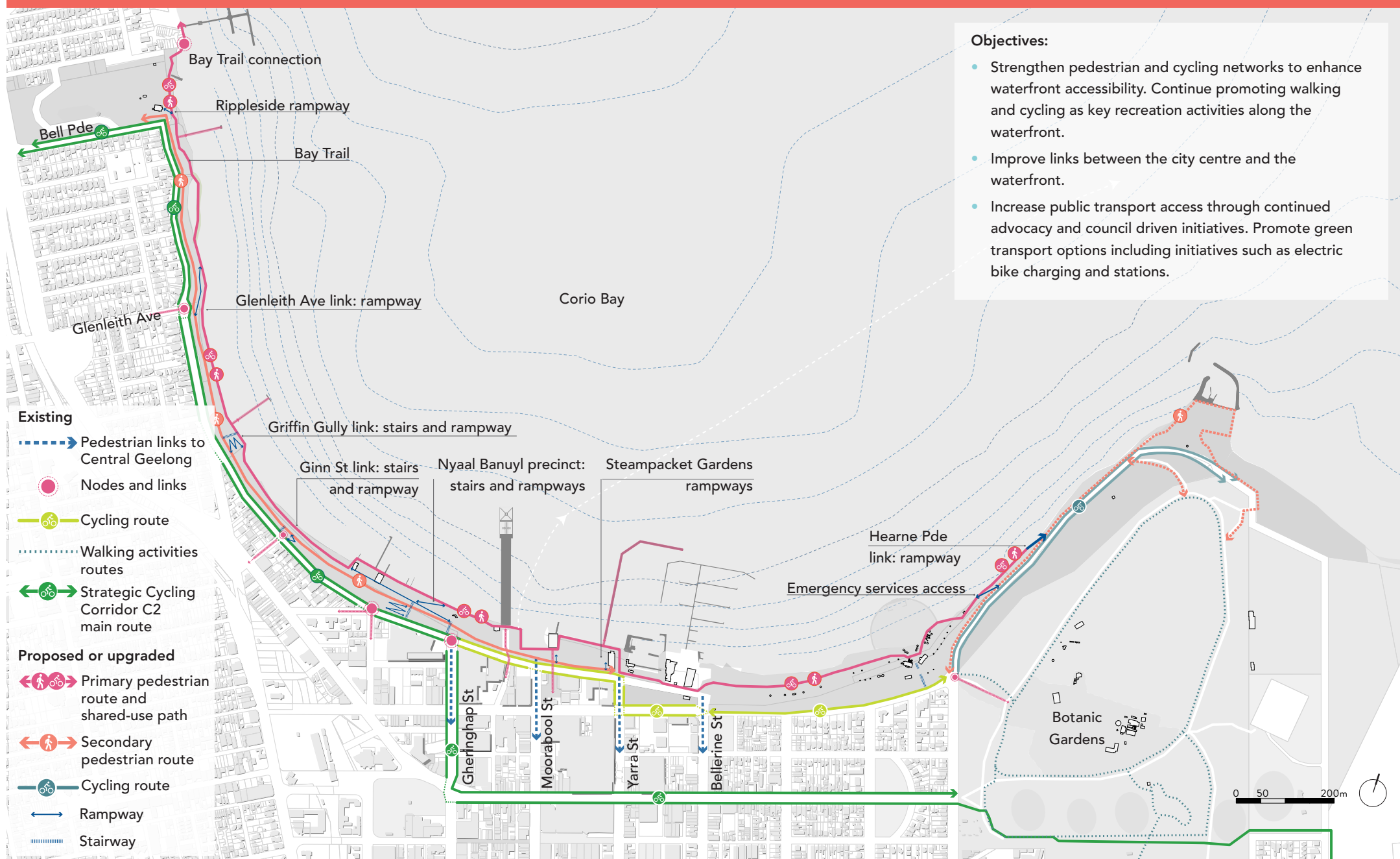


Figure 4. Connectivity and Movement

3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND ECOLOGY

Enhance and protect the waterfront coastal fringe to promote climate resilience and ecological health, ensuring long term sustainability and viability.



Figure 5. Environmental Protection, Climate Resilience and Ecology

3.3 CULTURE, HERITAGE AND PUBLIC ART

Celebrate and integrate Wadawurrung culture and Geelong's rich waterfront heritage, honouring the past while creating meaningful connections for the community.

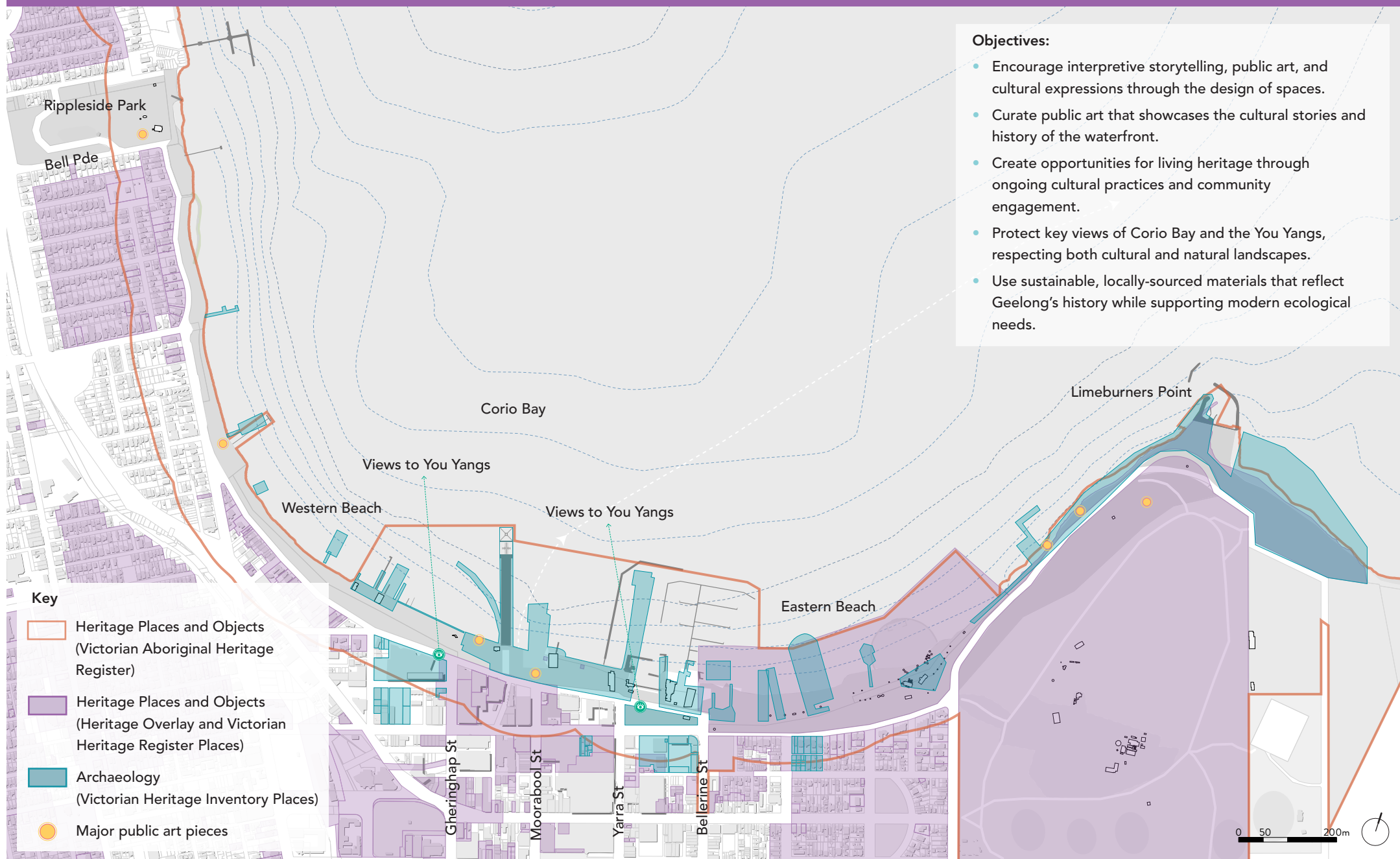


Figure 6. Culture, Heritage and Public Art

3.4 PLACE ACTIVATION, LIVELINESS AND VIBRANCY

Promote spaces that support sustainable day and night activation, encourage social interaction, improve access to the water, and enable opportunities for local businesses, waterfront events and community activation.

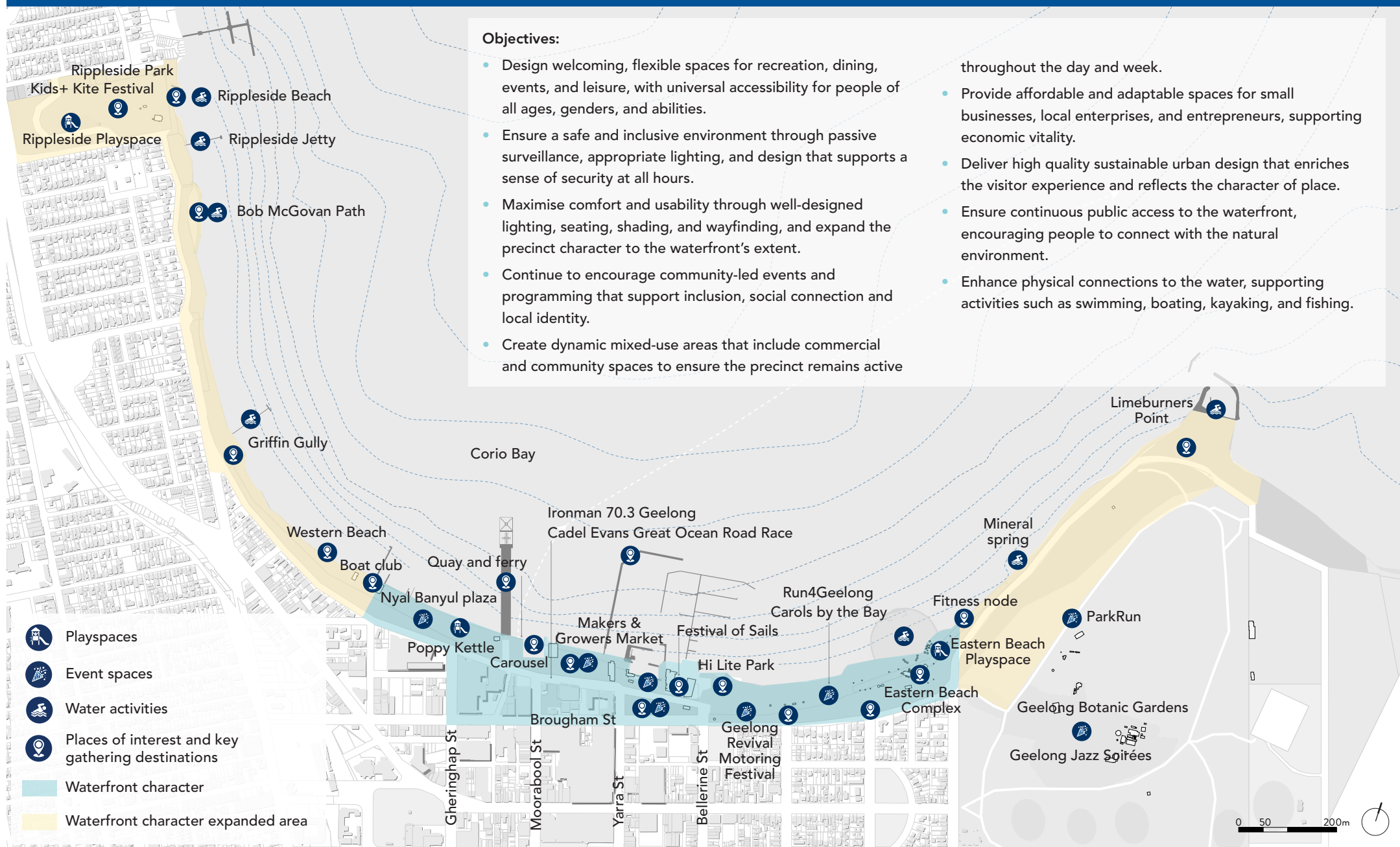


Figure 7. Place Activation, Liveliness and Vibrancy