

Victoria's new youth justice facility: Business Case Overview

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Introduction

In February 2017 the Victorian Government announced plans to build a new youth justice facility on a government-owned site at Hoppers Lane South in Werribee South.

This new youth justice facility is an important investment in urgently needed infrastructure. It is part of a significant program of upgrades and improvements to existing infrastructure to ensure the safety of the wider community, youth justice staff and those young people who are in contact with the justice system.

The Youth Justice Precinct Redevelopment Business Case was developed by the Victorian Government to address current infrastructure and capacity issues at the existing Parkville facility. The business case sought to evaluate options to address this issue and recommended an investment in a new youth justice facility located at the preferred site of Hoppers Lane South, Werribee South.

A range of options were carefully assessed as part of the business case process, including redeveloping the existing Parkville facility, building a new facility on a preferred greenfield site and a combination of both these options. After assessment, it was determined that a contemporary standard secure youth justice facility should be built on a greenfield site to replace the existing Parkville facility.

Because of the sensitive information included in the business case, which includes confidential details about youth justice stakeholders and commercially sensitive information about land assessment, it is inappropriate to release the detailed business case in full. Security and design features of construction, if released, could compromise the security of the facility, along with procurement processes that would impact on sensitive commercial dealings.

This document includes information about the considered business case process that was undertaken to determine the preferred site, including the selection criteria against which multiple sites were assessed.

The business case was completed for the purpose of:

- seeking a preferred option for improving youth justice infrastructure including the development of a new facility;
- assessing possible suitable locations for a new facility against a set criteria;
- seeking approval of the funding required to achieve these outcomes.

This important investment in new infrastructure is one of several measures being implemented to overhaul the youth justice system in Victoria to ensure the safety, security and wellbeing of staff, young people and the wider community.

Key project drivers and considerations

There has been growing pressure on the youth justice system in recent times. The changing nature of youth crime and the needs of young offenders means it is critical that a new youth justice facility be built as soon as possible. The new youth justice facility must also respond effectively to the changing needs of the youth justice system.

The business case considered a range of strategic interventions to address existing challenges. These can be broadly summarised as:

- **Reducing demand.** Expanding existing diversion strategies including intensive bail support. The Government is already implementing a series of initiatives called the Youth Justice Reform Package.
- **Improving productivity.** Increasing investment in programs offered within youth justice, with the aim of improving offender rehabilitation and reducing the likelihood of re-offending.
- **Improving supply.** Redeveloping existing infrastructure, either on the existing Parkville site or by developing a new site, or by considering a hybrid option.
- **Increasing supply.** This option involved the operation of a new facility on a greenfield site in tandem with the youth justice centre at Parkville.

The business case also detailed reviews of the youth justice system since 2010, when a Victorian Ombudsman's investigation was conducted into conditions at the Melbourne Youth Justice Precinct. The recommendations from these reviews cover the themes of youth justice workforce, infrastructure and the youth justice operating model.

The most recent review considered was a review by Neil Comrie OAM, who was engaged to conduct a review of the riots at the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct between 12 and 14 November 2016. Mr Comrie concluded that the precinct is inadequate for its current purpose, with significant shortcomings in design and construction. He concludes that current fortification work at Parkville cannot be regarded as making these units 'fit for purpose' in the longer term.

In a summary of key problems, the three main issues are assessed as:

- Staff and young people are exposed to the risk of harm because Parkville was not designed for today's offender behaviour and operating practices.
- Frequent incidents undermine management's ability to steer young people away from adult crime and a life of social disadvantage.
- Incidents of increasing severity undermine trust in Victoria's youth justice system.

The business case concludes that existing facilities at Parkville do not enable staff to optimally manage detainees and that the need to replace the existing custodial youth justice facilities at Parkville is now critical.

Project timing

After considering the business case, the Government has confirmed funding for the project and gave approval to proceed with the land acquisition for the preferred site.

The timeline for the planning, procurement and delivery of what will be a major investment is estimated to be up to three and a half years. A funding decision made to coincide with the 2017–18 budget cycle provides for the facility to be fully operational in 2020–21.

Due diligence works are now being undertaken with a view to securing the purchase of the preferred site from the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources. Planning considerations will be a pre-condition for the purchase of the site and the delivery of the project.

Key project drivers and considerations

Policy considerations

There is strong community expectation that the Government oversees a youth justice system that is secure, safe and effective. To achieve this, it is important that the operating model and design of the new facility is informed by best practice to ensure that the facility is secure, ensures the wellbeing of young people and staff, and provides a rehabilitative environment to reduce recidivism.

The operating model and design of the facility will consider recommendations of the Review of Youth Support, Youth Diversion and Youth Justice Programs currently being undertaken by Penny Armytage of KPMG and Professor James Ogloff of Swinburne University of Technology's Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, and discussions with experts from the youth and justice sectors, across Government and with the community.

Changing offender profile

Recent research from the Crime Statistics Agency confirms that, while the overall number of young offenders in Victoria has been decreasing since 2010, there is a very small proportion of young people who are responsible for a disproportionately high number of criminal incidents.

Statistically, 1.6 per cent of young offenders were responsible for 21 per cent of incidents. This means there has been an increase in severe and recidivist offending by some young offenders.

In the rolling 12 months to December 2016, the volume of distinct youth offenders decreased by 2.4 per cent compared with the previous period, however, youth committed a higher number of offences per offender (+11.6 per cent).

The strong diversionary focus of the Victorian criminal justice system means that those young people detained in custody are the most complex and often display challenging behaviours.

Offenders are now presenting with more complex issues such as drug and alcohol dependencies and those in custody are being held for comparatively more violent offences or for increased numbers of offences.

Additionally, there has been an increase in both the number and proportion of young people on remand. On an average day in 2012–13, 22 per cent of the total number of young people in youth justice centres were on remand. In 2015–16 this proportion had increased to 42 per cent.

Remandees are often volatile and unsettled, entering custody straight from their offending.

At Parkville Youth Justice Precinct, the business case examined data which showed the number and proportion of young people on remand began to significantly increase from 2013.

In accordance with current legislation, young people on remand must present to the Children's or Magistrates' Court every 21 days and uncertainty around their length of stay can make it more difficult in comparison to sentenced young people to establish meaningful daily routines.

Table 1.4 Youth Offending Frequency 2014–2016

Number of Incidents Recorded	Unique Offenders		Incidents	
	%	Number	%	Number
1 incident	63.2	7,852	21.5	7,852
2 incidents	14.1	1,752	9.6	3,504
3 to 5 incidents	11.5	1,435	14.5	5,298
6 to 10 incidents	5.7	706	14.5	5,305
11 or more incidents	5.5	687	40.0	14,624
Total	100	12,432	100	36,583

Source: Crime Statistics Agency

Site assessment process

The Victorian Government initially considered a number of sites across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria to assess their suitability for a new youth justice facility. Some sites were eliminated as being unsuitable in the early stages of scoping the business case. Site criteria also had to take into account youth justice statutory obligations under relevant legislation.

Detailed assessment

The business case conducted a detailed assessment of 16 potential locations, including four regional locations, against an initial set of criteria informed by experts from across Government.

Due to the urgency of finding an appropriate response, two 'threshold' criteria were utilised to inform the detailed assessment:

- Proximity to sensitive land uses – preferably not within residential areas (or able to address potential impacts).
- Deliverability – site available immediately, and with single or minimal purchasing transactions.

Regional locations were found to be unsuitable given the operational constraints imposed by a location that was distant to core supporting services and harder to access for youth justice staff and young people's families. This is because there is a statutory obligation on the department to ensure young offenders' prospects of rehabilitation through access to family visits.

Of the sites assessed it was concluded that a site in western or northern Melbourne would perform best in terms of existing employee accessibility.

After assessment of the 16 potential locations against the threshold criteria, two metropolitan sites were assessed as most suitable – Hoppers Lane South, Werribee South and another site in metropolitan Melbourne.

The business case ultimately assessed the other metropolitan site as being less suitable for reasons addressed later in this document (see page 6).

Site selection criteria

Key selection criteria

- Generally outer and greenfield areas.
- 20–25 hectare site size.
- Roughly square (not too narrow) or able to accommodate a suitably proportioned centre footprint in the case of a suggested larger site.
- Close to the existing or future principal public transport network (train stations preferred and/or high frequency bus routes).
- Preferably not within residential areas (or ability to address potential adverse amenity impacts).
- Preferably within employment areas (with uses that limit adverse impact on the 'residential' nature of the facility).
- Ability to provide effective/positive interface to adjoining uses.
- Relatively flat sites with no (or manageable) encumbrances.
- Single or minimal purchasing transactions.

General Functionality

- How well does the option support the delivery of services to offenders?
- How well does the option support the delivery of safe and secure outcomes?
- How flexible is the option in meeting potential future operational pressures including changing offender group and potential increased demand?

Access and Connectivity

- Does the option have enough space to meet operational requirements?
- Is the option well located to access for support services, including family support?
- Does the option provide for active connectivity to broader services?

Externalities

- Are there external agencies that will have a significant impact on the delivery of the option?
- Are locational issues a significant concern for the option development; are local issues likely to be a major concern?
- Is the option likely to have significant regulatory issues to address, is there likely to be planning permit issues?
- How straightforward is delivery and can delivery readily be staged?

Delivery risk

- Is there unknown planning risk?
- Can the development be staged?
- Are there existing or proposed essential services to site?
- Are there any unidentified development risks such as flora and fauna, archaeological, contamination?

Why the preferred site was selected

The Hoppers Lane South site was identified as the preferred location for the new youth justice facility for a number of reasons, including:

- its proximity to the Melbourne central business district (CBD)
- its central location, ensuring accessibility from other parts of the state for staff and families
- the size and shape of the land
- population growth projections
- access to transport
- access to existing or proposed government and community services
- availability to commence development in the short term
- surplus land for further growth if required
- more accessible to a larger proportion of youth justice staff and families of young people.

Environmental impacts were also considered, with a biodiversity assessment being undertaken. The assessment concluded that the Hoppers Lane South site almost entirely consists of introduced flora species and provides habitat for common fauna species, mainly birds. There are no significant flora and fauna species recorded from the study area.

The other metropolitan site was assessed less favourably for a number of reasons, including that there were more encumbrances that would slow down the development process due to it being privately owned by multiple parties, is partially flood prone, and smaller in size.

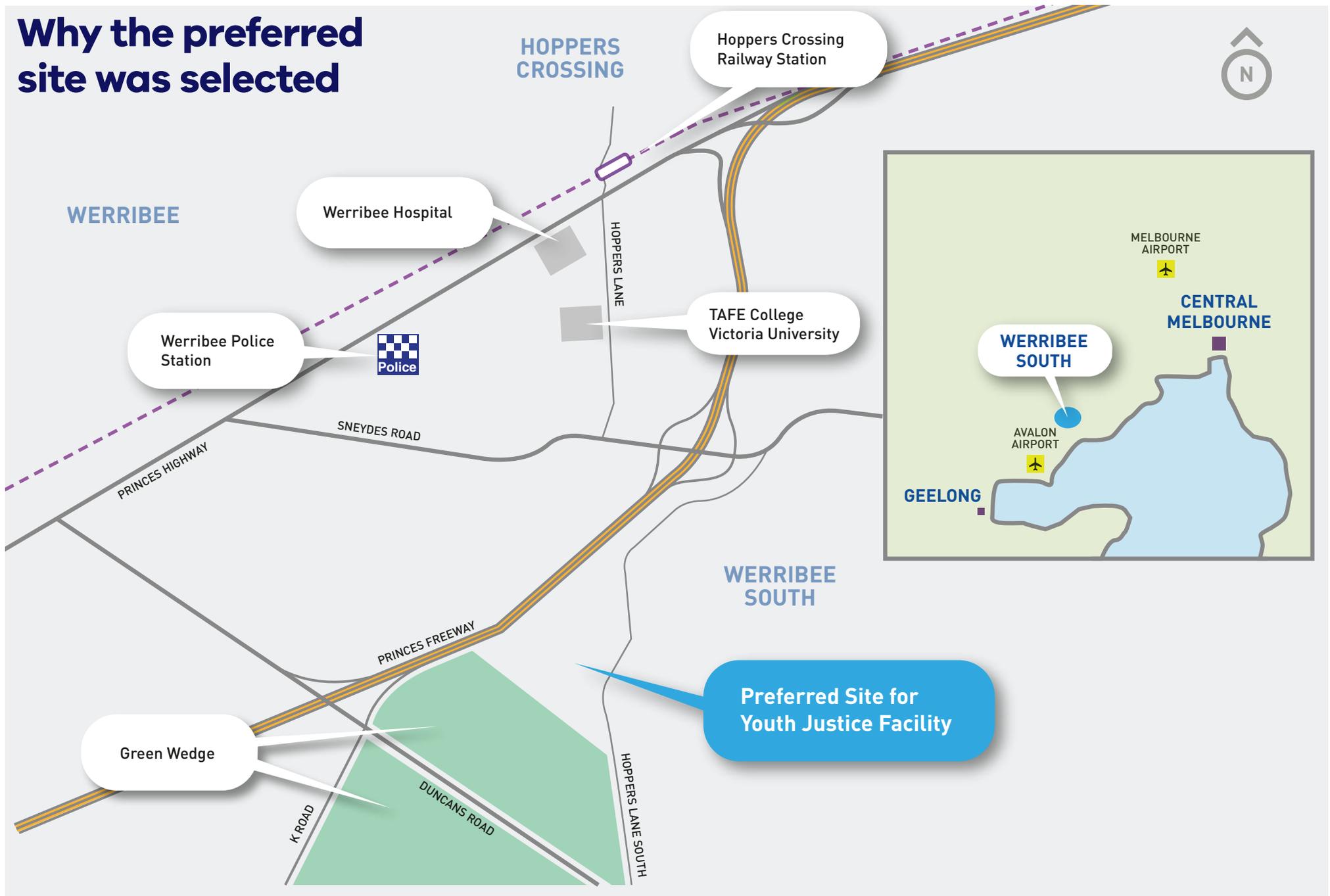
Under current planning policy, the site at Hoppers Lane South is scheduled as Urban Growth Zone and earmarked under structure planning for industrial development.

The large number of jobs the facility will employ during construction and operation will have a positive social impact for the growing Wyndham community.

The new facility represents an investment of more than \$288 million and is expected to create up to 3000 construction and related jobs, delivering an estimated economic benefit of almost \$420 million to the community during the construction phase.

Once it opens, the new facility will bring 450 ongoing jobs to the area, providing opportunities for local businesses. It will also support the development of new infrastructure, including improved public transport.

Why the preferred site was selected



For the latest information about the project, please visit www.dhhs.vic.gov.au or call the dedicated Youth Justice Centre Information Line from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday on 1800 630 738.

Youth Justice Precinct Redevelopment Project

Summary of the business case addendum

The addendum to the Youth Justice Precinct Redevelopment Project Business Case recommends an alternative site for the proposed new youth justice facility.

In February 2017, the Victorian Government announced plans to build a new youth justice facility on a government-owned site on Hoppers Lane South, Werribee South. The announcement indicated that this was the preferred location and that close consultation would be undertaken with the local community about the project.

The Victorian Government met with community representatives and with the Council to discuss the preferred site. During the meeting the Council and the community representatives acknowledged the need for a new youth justice facility, but expressed their concerns with the proposed location at Werribee South. The Victorian Government committed to further working together with Council to examine alternative sites for the youth justice facility within Wyndham City. The Victorian Government has met regularly and extensively with Council since that time.

A review of several alternative sites has been undertaken. A potential alternative site referred to as Cherry Creek, was identified. The site has been assessed against the original site selection criteria used in the business case. The assessment concludes that the alternative site meets the criteria.

The proposed alternative site remains more suitable than other sites considered and rejected as part of the consideration of the original business case.

The site itself is freehold land currently owned by Melbourne Water. Melbourne Water had indicated that the land was not deemed surplus to their needs, which is why it was not identified as part of the original business case investigation. However, Melbourne Water have confirmed their preparedness to transfer the land to the department.

The whole site is approximately 60 hectares and is bordered by an existing quarry and the Wyndham Refuse Disposal Centre to the east, the Melbourne-Geelong railway line to the north, the Princes Freeway to the south and private land (earmarked for a future quarry) to the west. There is also an easement (approximately 30m wide) along the western boundary of the site for a gas pipe line. The site is currently vacant land of which parts are used for grazing and crop cultivation.

Werribee station is approximately 11km away and Little River station is approximately 6km away.

Community engagement

A Community Advisory Group (CAG) will be established as is standard with similar projects. Information sessions for broader community engagement will also be scheduled.

Alternative Location (Cherry Creek)

