

Working towards the
Community Vision 2034

Economic Growth & Tourism Strategic Plan | 2025-30

Supporting evidence



SWOT analysis

Strengths

Strategic location and connectivity

- Just 40 minutes from Adelaide's CBD and airport
- Excellent road access via the Southern Expressway and South Road/Victor Harbor Road upgrades
- Proximity to city and metro markets supports workforce mobility and business growth

Liveability and lifestyle appeal

- Highly desirable lifestyle with affordable housing and commercial land
- Free carparking, accessible open space and amenities
- Strong local workforce and growing population in SA's largest metropolitan LGA
- Appealing environment for families, entrepreneurs, and skilled professionals

Diverse and growing economy

- Over 10,000 businesses across varied sectors including wine, tourism, advanced manufacturing, health, construction, and retail
- Strong local business community with increasing start-ups and expansion activity

- High-quality local products and services with growing B2B collaboration
- Competitive cost environment for business set-up and operations

Business support and advocacy

- Active council-led support through grants, mentoring, awards, workshops and local promotion
- Business-friendly culture supported by Onkaparinga Ambassadors and strong advocacy
- Presence of SRWRA and industrial precincts like Lonsdale supporting logistics and clean tech

Tourism and visitor economy

- Well-located Visitor Information Centre
- Unique mix of coast and wine country located so close to a capital city – a key competitive advantage
- McLaren Vale's global recognition as a premier wine region
- Diverse experiences on offer: award-winning wine, coastal adventures, local produce, family-friendly attractions, and eco-tourism
- Iconic attractions like d'Arenberg Cube, Wirra

Wirra and Gemtree (part of Tourism Australia's Ultimate Wine Experiences)

- Natural assets: Onkaparinga River National Park, Aldinga Conservation Park, Port Noarlunga reef, pristine beaches, and outdoor adventure opportunities
- Ability to drive on beaches offers a unique experience
- Inclusion on key state/regional tourism routes e.g. Route 31.

Weaknesses

Employment and workforce development

- 61% of residents leave the city for work, indicating limited local employment opportunities
- High proportion of small businesses (98% are SMEs), with few large employers or exporters
- Skills gaps due to absence of a local university campus and limited access to relevant VET or TAFE training locally
- Workforce challenges for part-time and casual employers, particularly in tourism and hospitality sectors

Business and investment constraints

- Limited greenfield and commercial land availability to attract or scale new industry
- Reliance on development of Port Stanvac site, over which council has no control
- Infrastructure constraints in key industrial precincts like Lonsdale
- Infrequent use of the council's car parking fund for economic development initiatives
- Some internal red tape and planning process barriers (e.g. change of use, expansion)

- Low business engagement—only 20% interact with council's business support services, and no central CRM system to track business interactions

Tourism infrastructure and experience gaps

- Lack of large-scale and diverse accommodation options to support overnight and extended stays
- Lack of low cost overnight stays, limiting self-drive tourism options
- Seasonal and mid-week visitation lulls impact business viability and opening hours
- Limited development of esplanade and foreshore areas due to minimal commercial/ tourism zoned land
- Inconsistent mainstreet presentation and tourism infrastructure across townships
- Weak night-time economy, particularly in off-peak months
- Absence of high-profile, tourism-driven events to generate economic uplift

Connectivity and transport issues

- Public transport gaps, including train line ending at Seaford and poor integration with visitor travel services

- Congestion along Main South Road affects logistics, resident movement, and visitor access
- Digital connectivity issues with broadband and high-speed internet blackspots in parts of the region

Collaboration and community awareness

- Limited awareness among some residents and businesses of the benefits of tourism
- Lack of integration of disruptive platforms like Airbnb and Uber into the local visitor economy
- Need for stronger collaboration with industry bodies
- No active business and tourism associations in the northern parts of the city

Opportunities

Business growth and industry development

- Redevelopment of the Port Stanvac site to unlock significant industrial and employment potential
- Attraction of new investment through supply chain opportunities and targeted sector growth
- Expansion of circular economy initiatives via SRWRA
- Strategic land acquisition by council to drive long-term rate revenue and economic return
- Growth of social enterprises and businesses committed to sustainability practices
- Leveraging local procurement to support local businesses and stimulate the economy
- Support for export market development and international connections

Business support, activation and engagement

- More year-round precinct activations, particularly in winter and shoulder seasons
- Improved business engagement and networking, including precinct-based and business and tourism support

- Streamlined council processes to enhance business-friendly practices and increase understanding of planning and approvals
- Business capacity building through workshops, mentoring, and information-sharing
- Youth career pathways and skill development to support future workforce needs

Destination development and tourism activation

- Development of a Tourism Event Attraction Plan and increased support for tourism-focused events
- Investment in tourism accommodation projects, tourist park upgrades and accessible tourism including council-owned assets
- Expanded use of council facilities for commercial activities (e.g. VIC, golf courses, aquatic centre)
- Strengthened collaboration with SATC, Fleurieu Peninsula Tourism and TICSa for trade readiness, visitor experience and industry development
- Growth of destination marketing and media hosting
- Promotion of the Great Australian Wine Trail, Route 31, and wine and food events

Nature, culture and outdoor experiences

- Activation of natural assets like Onkaparinga Gorge, Ochre Point, Happy Valley Reservoir and Wearing Street Port Noarlunga for kayaking, hiking and cycling
- Expansion of sports tourism (e.g. PGA, Tour Down Under spin-offs)
- Development of Indigenous tourism experiences and historical precincts
- Improved access and amenities in pet-friendly and family-friendly destinations
- Better integration of tourism and economic outcomes into council infrastructure projects

Place-making and precinct potential

- Urban renewal of identified locations of Noarlunga Centre, Port Noarlunga South, Aldinga and Sellicks Beach
- Beautification and public realm upgrades in industrial and tourism precincts
- Improved connectivity and signage to support visitor dispersal and exploration
- Opportunities to position Onkaparinga as a region offering the best of the coast and the Fleurieu – all within 40km of Adelaide

Threats

Economic and market conditions

- Rising cost of living and doing business, driven by inflation and global volatility
- Ongoing housing and rental pressures, affecting residents, workers, and housing affordability across all income levels
- Skilled workforce shortages, especially in tourism, hospitality, and trades
- Disruption to supply chains and rising costs of materials, particularly in construction and manufacturing
- IT and telecommunications blackspots, limiting business productivity and connectivity
- Wine export risks related to trade agreements and geopolitical tensions (e.g. China Free Trade Agreement)
- Return of international travel, reducing domestic tourism demand

Labour force and demographics

- High unemployment and youth disengagement in some areas
- Ageing population and workforce, with fewer job opportunities for older workers
- Socio-economic disadvantage and homelessness impacting community wellbeing and economic inclusion

- Limited talent attraction and retention, especially for specialised skills
- Insufficient accommodation for both visitors and the local workforce
- Lack of cheap, reliable public transport, affecting access to employment and visitor mobility

Infrastructure and investment challenges

- Underinvestment in infrastructure needed to support business and tourism growth
- Ongoing public consultation processes can delay development
- Council capacity constraints in delivering timely planning approvals and business support
- Limited industrial and commercial land supply, constraining business growth
- Risk that business needs outpace council service capacity, especially with a growing population
- Infrastructure strain from rapid population growth, particularly in new and infill developments
- Increased risk of climate-related events such as storm surges and coastal erosion impacting infrastructure and assets

Regulatory and policy pressures

- Character Preservation legislation limits development in protected areas, potentially hindering growth

- Policy and regulatory changes (e.g. new Food Safety Standards) add complexity and cost to business operations
- Risk of fraudulent activity targeting vulnerable small businesses

Structural and strategic gaps

- Lack of engagement with northern business precincts without associations (e.g. Lonsdale, Morphett Vale, Reynella)
- Fragmented regional identity, with the city straddling rural and metropolitan characteristics
- Difficulty in maintaining a diverse, sustainable economy amid global and local pressures
- Lack of timely tourism data (12-month lag) limits agile decision-making and performance tracking

Tourism-specific threats

- Car-dependent visitation (self-drive market) creates barriers for visitors without transport
- Proximity to Adelaide encourages day trips over overnight stays, limiting visitor spend
- Tourism workforce shortages, especially in frontline roles (chefs, waiting staff)
- Seasonal peaks and lows make it hard for tourism operators to sustain consistent staffing and services
- Overcrowding at coastal locations during peak times

Economic health check summary

Positive Factors

Economic conditions

- Strong job market growth: Onkaparinga's job market saw significant growth from 2017 to 2021, surpassing the Greater Adelaide average.
- Favourable labour market condition: A tight labour market in 2022 led to a historic low in unemployment, with rates stabilising by 2023.
- Increased participation: Rising participation rates have supported economic growth, driven by strong labour demand.
- Diverse industry growth: Onkaparinga's industry diversity has improved driven by growth in industrial sectors.

Industry

- Specialised strengths: Onkaparinga's economy is characterised by strong specialisations in wine, furniture and metal manufacturing, construction and population services.
- Industrial growth: Onkaparinga's manufacturing sector is expanding, particularly in metal manufacturing, capturing a larger share of Greater Adelaide's manufacturing jobs.

- Steady growth in non-residential buildings: Non-residential building activity is on a steady upward trend, with a notable surge in 2024 driven by the Noarlunga Hospital Expansion project. Retail, wholesale, warehousing, and health are driving the non-residential building activity, providing important employment space once completed.
- Health sector boom: Health Care and Social Assistance has been a key driver of job and economic value growth, particularly in allied health and disabilities services driven by NDIS and the ageing population.
- Long term uptrend in tourism daytrip visitation: In 2023, tourism visitation increased driven by daytrip visitation, providing a boost to the local accommodation, food and retail businesses.

Precincts

- Key employment hubs: Lonsdale and Christie Downs (Noarlunga) are established strategic employment areas that contribute significantly to local job creation.
- Broad business growth: Business growth has been strong across Onkaparinga, particularly in Aldinga, Christies Beach, Seaford-Seaford Meadows, and Morphett Vale – East, where many of these businesses were home based and/or small businesses.

Socio-economic

- In-migration trends: The region is attracting families, while population growth is mainly driven by seniors.
- Work-from-home shift: An increase in working from home may further increase internal migration to the region and support local businesses.

Outlook

- Future workforce: Future population growth is expected to be driven by families, stimulating demand for population-serving industries. Moreover, growth in the older population can boost the specialised Residential Care industry.
- Sectoral growth potential: Industrial, Construction, Other Services (e.g. Repair and maintenance, Personal Care Services), and Tourism sectors have strong growth opportunities, positioning Onkaparinga for future economic growth. Particularly, the Manufacturing sector has a strong export exposure allowing growth beyond the population constraint.

Negative Factors

Economic conditions

- Economic slowdown: Economic growth slowed in 2023, largely due to a decline in construction activities, more so than in Greater Adelaide. Factors behind the slowdown include the end of HomeBuilder, rising interest rates, cost of living pressures, and increasing building costs. However, construction activity from the Noarlunga Hospital Expansion project is expected to provide a boost in 2024.
- Higher unemployment rates: Despite improvements, Onkaparinga's unemployment rate remains above the Greater Adelaide average.
- Population-driven growth: Economic growth is largely reliant on population increases, with participation rates impacted by an aging population.
- Slowdown in business growth: After strong growth from September 2021 to 2022, net business growth decreased significantly. However, the business growth recovered back to pre-COVID levels by December 2023.

Industry

- Service sector deficits: Significant job gaps persist in service sectors like business services, government, and IT. Subsequently, many resident workers are employed outside the City, with a large number commuting to the Adelaide CBD.
- Retail sector struggles: Retail trade employment is declining, appears to be affected by the rise in online shopping.
- Stagnant growth in overnight visitation: Despite the rebound in tourism, growth is primarily driven by lower-value day trips rather than higher-value overnight stays.

Precincts

- Agglomeration challenges: Limited employment space development, a less skilled workforce, and an existing preference for inner Adelaide locations hinder the potential benefits of agglomeration for business services.
- Spending leakage: Local retail growth is limited by spending leakage to other regions.

Socio-economic

- Youth Unemployment: Despite improvements, youth unemployment remains notably higher than in other parts of Greater Adelaide.
- Educational disparity: Onkaparinga residents generally have lower educational qualifications than the Greater Adelaide average, which may hinder higher skilled service attraction.
- Spots of disadvantage: Areas of Onkaparinga have a higher level of socio-economic disadvantage compared to Greater Adelaide.

Outlook

- Skills gap: Limited educational levels and a shortage of skilled workers may constrain growth in key sectors like technology and professional services.
- Housing challenges: Increasing housing costs, limited rental availability and dwelling options disproportionately impact young and low-income households and may impact future growth in these cohorts.
- Competitive labour market: Onkaparinga businesses face challenges in competing for workers against inner Adelaide, especially with a pay gap and historically high jobs demand.
- Climate Challenges: Climate change could pose additional risks to the region's economy, particularly in terms of the Wine industry.

Summary of engagement

Introduction

The City of Onkaparinga is taking a significant step towards shaping the future of our local economy by developing a comprehensive Economic Growth & Tourism Strategic Plan 2025-30. This initiative is designed to capitalise on our city's unique strengths while addressing economic challenges to foster sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

Engagement purpose

The strategic plan will guide economic growth and tourism into the future and provide a blueprint for creating a vibrant local economy, attracting investment, and promoting tourism. It is aimed at improving the lives of our residents and supporting the success of local businesses, ensuring that our community continues to thrive.

We recognise the importance of engaging with all stakeholders, including businesses, residents, industry leaders, and internal stakeholders, to develop a plan that is robust, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of our community.

Engagement techniques

Engagement for the development of the Economic Growth & Tourism Strategic Plan 2025–2030 was undertaken in four key stages between August 2024 and May 2025 to ensure a collaborative and informed approach:

Stage 1

Online engagement tools were launched on the Your Say Onkaparinga platform, including:

- A business survey to capture key data
- An interactive mapping tool to gather ideas for place-based improvements
- A 'gather' tool for community members to share economic development opportunities

Findings from Stage 1 directly informed the Draft Plan.

Stage 2

Face-to-face and online workshops were held with key stakeholders, including:

- Business and tourism operators
- Onkaparinga Ambassadors
- Elected Members
- Interested community members and industry representatives

These sessions explored challenges, opportunities, and priorities to shape the strategic direction.

Stage 3

Public consultation on the draft Economic Growth & Tourism Strategic Plan 2025–2030.

Stage 4

Final plan endorsement and publication, supported by a communications rollout to stakeholders and the community.

Engagement highlights

Participation snapshot

- **873** unique visits to the engagement webpage
- **196** contributors across all engagement tools
- **228** individual contributions received

Business survey outcomes

- 149 businesses completed the survey, reflecting a diverse mix of industry sectors, locations, and business models:
- 41% sole traders | 51% companies/partnerships
- 57% female respondents | 43% male
- Broad age and operational tenure representation

Business outlook

- Current local economy rated as fair by 53%, poor by 23%, and good by 16%
- 79% reported their business as either stable or growing
- 41% somewhat confident, 38% confident about their future in the region

Top business pressures

- Financial health (sales, costs, cash flow)
- Customer attraction and retention
- Marketing and promotion
- Staffing and skills shortages
- Business premises limitations

Key business goals

- 75% aim to increase revenue
- 28% identified marketing and promotion
- 25% prioritised product expansion, brand recognition, and online presence

Support needs for the next 3–5 years

- Marketing and promotion (71%)
- Grant funding (50%)
- Digital engagement (48%)
- Networking opportunities (43%)
- Red tape reduction (30%)

Other Insights

- 46% had not accessed council support services
- Environmental sustainability rated as important by 125 businesses (50%+ significance)

Go South Go Local – business feedback

- 70% of respondents were aware of the campaign

- 84% agreed council should run a shop local initiative
- Priorities for future development included:
 - o More marketing opportunities (75%)
 - o Business advertising options (67%)
 - o Promotional collateral and a dedicated Facebook page (45% each)

Tourism insights

- 70% awareness of the City's tourism brand
- Majority rely on local patronage for over 50% of their business
- Top tourism priorities:
 - o Destination marketing (78%)
 - o Events and activations (59%)
 - o Place-making and precinct improvement (53%)

Common visitor complaints

- Limited night-time trading and dining
- Poor public transport
- Shortage of accommodation
- General township amenity issues

Visitor surprises

- Range of activities
- Proximity of wine regions to the coast
- Natural scenery
- Close connection to Adelaide

Interactive mapping tool outcomes

Twelve submissions highlighted local improvement ideas:

- Community aquatic centre in Aldinga
- More walkable McLaren Vale main street
- Park activation and improved amenities
- Safe cycleways and Route 31 signage
- Lighting upgrades along Aldinga Beach Esplanade
- Accommodation options in McLaren Vale
- Enclosed dog parks in Seaford
- Revitalising Beach Road for nightlife
- Pop-up and co-working spaces

Gather tool outcomes

Five submissions explored key economic opportunities:

- Support to reduce business operating costs
- Eco-village inspired development models
- Tourism infrastructure like large-scale accommodation
- Repositioning Beach Road as a key hospitality hub
- Local shopper loyalty incentives

Workshop outcomes

Business and community stakeholder workshops

Feedback from four stakeholder sessions identified common themes:

- **Economic confidence** – Businesses are cautious and need council support to reduce risk and stimulate investment.
- **Collaboration** – Stronger business networks and council facilitation of referrals are highly valued.
- **Workforce development** – Issues with staffing, especially youth in hospitality, highlighted the need for skill-building initiatives.

- **Public space activation** – Events and strategic tenancy planning were seen as ways to boost vibrancy.
- **Streamlined processes** – Participants called for easier, more flexible permit and approval systems.
- **Local promotion** – Enhanced marketing and highly supportive of the Go South Go Local initiative
- **Transport and access** – Improved connectivity was viewed as an enabler for economic and tourism success.
- **Sustainability support** – Incentives and practical support for eco-friendly practices were encouraged.
- **Attracting talent** – Attracting and retaining skilled workers remains a key concern.
- **Vision and partnership** – Businesses want council to take a facilitative role in long-term, collaborative growth.

Elected member workshop

Held on 19 November 2024, this session reaffirmed council's role as:

- An enabler, connector, and advocate
- A capacity builder and data provider
- A promoter of the region and champion of local spending

Why the strategic plan matters

Elected members saw the plan as a vital tool to:

- Drive investment and clarify council's economic role
- Guide planning and strengthen stakeholder partnerships
- Support job creation and visitor growth
- Track and measure impact over time.

Top priorities for investment

- Business-to-business collaboration
- Visitor attraction
- Long-term economic advocacy
- Business support programs and training
- Industry diversification and job creation.

Conclusion

This comprehensive engagement process has shaped a strategic plan that reflects the values, aspirations, and priorities of Onkaparinga's business and tourism communities.

Insights from this process directly informed the focus areas and strategic objectives outlined in the Economic Growth & Tourism Strategic Plan 2025–2030 ensuring it is both locally relevant and future-focused.

