

Cessnock City Council Joint Use and Co-Location of Public Buildings

Cessnock City Council is committed to the provision of community facilities and supports a network of localised and regional facilities across the LGA. These facilities are comprised of a mix of relocated, retrofitted and purpose built structures that address a diverse range of community needs including:

- Social and recreational
- Educational
- Childcare and Children's services
- Sporting and leisure
- Home and Community Care services
- Youth services
- Multi Cultural services
- Health services

The main benefits Cessnock City Council sees in purpose built public buildings are as follows:

- There are more realistic opportunities to meet the needs of all stakeholders ie the community, Council, Government and Non-Government Agencies etc. For example, precise strategic planning can be undertaken and additional flexibility or adaptability can be incorporated to all stages of the buildings lifecycle; and
- There is increased capacity to house and cater for a diverse range of groups eg senior citizens to kindy gym.

Retrofitting and adaptive use

Traditionally, retrofitting and adaptive use have been Council's only option with regard to provision of community services and facilities and this has been due to the lack of large parcels of land in appropriate settings and locations. Additionally, the disparity of the Cessnock LGA has impacts on provision of such facilities, hence, the LGA supports three major urban centres located in Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and Greta/Branxton.

The decision to retrofit an existing building or to purpose build facilities is clearly linked to available budgets and resource allocations. In order to take advantage of opportunities that arise (for example funding and/or leveraged partnership opportunities), there is often a need to act quickly and the retrofit of an existing building is more achievable within the planned timeframe, budget and resources.

Frequently these retrofitted co-location centres accommodate the immediate needs of user groups but are inadequate in providing the scope to adapt to the changing demands of such groups. Repeatedly the physical design of the facility dictates the need for compromise. This is particularly apparent in the retrofit of historical or heritage buildings.

Conversely, the construction of purpose built facilities provides the opportunity to the benefits of improved space utilisation, promotion energy savings by utilising natural light, along with the ability to incorporate environmental systems and equipment.

Council has retrofitted several facilities in the LGA to cater for the co-location of HACC and disability services. A summary of the key issues arising out of the retrofit of two facilities, Kurri Kurri Community Centre and the Abermain School of Arts is as follows:

Kurri Kurri Community Centre (KKCC).

This facility was the former "Co-Operative Store" and the community identified strongly with the building which led to Council's tenure over the site. The building consists of three stories and the site houses a public library as well as a range of HACC services. The provision of library services is delivered from a dedicated area within the site.

In the late 80's/early 90's work commenced on the retrofit of the building to address the needs of the increasing number of HACC providers across the LGA. The main issues faced included the site's limited capacity to undertake major structural alterations, for example, the toilets could not be relocated to another part of the building and had to be worked around, resulting in limited practicality due to their location. Additionally, the parameters of the retrofit were dictated by the level of available funding and the project was likened to putting together a jigsaw puzzle.

With the abovementioned point in mind and considering the multi storey nature of the building, disabled access was a major obstacle that needed to be addressed. Existing disabled access to the building was limited and rampage was subsequently constructed to provide linkage to other areas of the building.

The retrofit provided discreet office space, meeting rooms and large program areas for joint use with the capacity to cater for larger community use eg Civic Receptions, School Presentations etc.

The improvements provided a level of functionality in accommodating the services, however, due to the limited capacity of the building as well as community lifestyle issues culminating in the growth of HACC services, progressive building improvements have been an ongoing concern for the site.

In 2003 further improvements to access were undertaken thereby providing the capacity to accommodate increased multi-use of the facility eg additional program room and meeting space. This was achieved by relocation of a major access ramp, the installation of divisible walls and other improvements.

Abermain School of Arts

Abermain School of Arts is similar to KKCC in that it has a strong identity in the community and Council has taken over the tenure of the building. Heritage components of the building provided limited scope to any major refurbishment to the building. For example, meeting the requirements of the BCA with regard to access and egress as well as limitations to facade and structural alterations.

The purpose of the retrofit of this building was to provide facilities and services that contribute to the health and well being of all members of the community. However, at times and regardless of the levels of intent this is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to achieve this.

The unsuitability of Abermain School of Arts for general community use can be attributed to a number of factors including, the inability to isolate a specific area for general community use, access issues relating to security of the building and ownership issues. Additional to this there is a purpose built community hall within close proximity to this building that could easily meet the needs of the community.

With the abovementioned point in mind the facility has proven to be better suited to co-location of HACC services. The venue has been successful in housing a diverse range of HACC/Health services for the ageing population eg Meals on Wheels office, Neighbour Care, Home Care, Kaludah day care and health services (aged care).

Proposed projects

Greta Multi Purpose Centre and Cessnock Multi Purpose Centre

Both of the abovementioned centres have been developed and will be undertaken via a collaborative partnership approach between Council, Government and Non-Government agencies as well as community organisations.

The collaborative partnership approach taken by Council in joint-use and co-location of public buildings is used not only as a means of maximising capital funding to community facilities but to ensure that precise planning takes place in order to meet the needs of the community as well as cater for the dynamic changes and trends that Local Government is often faced with, particularly with regard to the provision of community facilities. Cessnock City Council is seen as a role model in this approach and its success is evident through the amount of external funding and capital growth occurring across the LGA and shown in the following two examples.

Greta Multi Purpose Centre is a combination of a restoration/retrofit as well as construction of a purpose built centre and entails the restoration of the existing Greta Courthouse and Greta Council Chambers to incorporate a Rural Transaction Centre and office spaces and meeting rooms for HACC providers and community groups. The major component of this development will be the construction of a multi-purpose centre beside the existing buildings, which are of heritage significance and therefore limited in their capacity to be altered to meet the current needs of the community. The purpose built centre has been designed to meet the needs of the community that the existing community infrastructure in Greta can not.

Cessnock Multi Purpose Centre is one component of the Cessnock Civic Precinct Project, which involves the establishment of a full range of improved community facilities within close proximity. Council's aim has been to address a number of community needs through one integrated plan.

The Civic Precinct Project stems from Council's commitment to establish anew community centre following the demolition of the former town hall as part of the Cessnock's City Centre. Council has been working on the Civic Precinct project since 2000, undertaking consultation with the community and key stakeholders regarding their needs and determining suitable development sites.

The aim of the Cessnock Multi Purpose Centre is to address a diverse range of community needs within one multi faceted building. The key components of the building include:

- A divisible 500 seat auditorium;
- A modern senior citizen's centre;
- Community Development offices for local service providers;
- Specific performing arts facilities (sound proof room & theatre): and
- A commercial café.

The construction of the facility includes:

- Demolition of two existing single storey buildings;
- Refurbishment/retrofit of an existing two storey building;
- Construction of a purpose built structure linked to the existing two storey building;
and
- Formalisation of carparking.