

Forster Civic Centre Project

This Q&A sheet explains the process Council has undertaken so far on this significant project, and where we are headed from here with opening scheduled for October 2023.

Q: Where is the project located?

The site, known locally as 'the old school site', is located on the southern side of the Forster town centre on the corner of Lake, West and Middle Streets.

Q: What Council facilities are being proposed at the site?

The Developer will provide the following Council facilities:

- new public library of approx. 2,000 m² which is over double the size of the current Forster Library
- Customer Service Centre
- indoor and outdoor public community space
- a Visitor Information Centre
- community green spaces and gardens
- car parking spaces, disabled parking spaces and associated roadworks.

Q: What are the other uses proposed for the site?

In addition to the construction of the Council facilities, the Developer (Enyoc) is entitled to develop the residual of the site for commercial purposes and has received approval from the Joint Regional Planning Panel for development which includes seniors living apartments, supermarket and retail shops.

Q: Will all these facilities be constructed at once?

No, the Developer proposes to undertake the project over several stages. The first stage includes Council's facilities and residential apartments above Council's facilities.

Q: What car parking arrangements are planned for the site?

Over 180 car spaces will be constructed in the basement situated under the Council facilities for use by the general public. In addition, existing street parking will be enhanced.

Q: Who is the Developer?

Enyoc Pty Ltd has been appointed to undertake the development of the land. The Developer (Enyoc) and its team is associated with the owners and operators of the Evermore Retirement Living facility at Bruce Street, Forster.

Q: Why has Council entered into contractual arrangements with a private sector developer?

The Forster-Tuncurry area is under-serviced in terms of cultural and community infrastructure. The Forster School of Arts Hall was decommissioned in 2007 and has not been replaced, leaving the area without local facilities to support a range of community uses. The existing Forster Library is a heavily utilised regional facility which is currently only half the NSW Library minimum recommended size for the community it serves.

To address these growing needs, Council assessed various options and in December 2015 issued a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) seeking responses from parties interested in providing development services to Council and the opportunity to develop the remainder of the land for private purposes.

Following the initial EOI process, Council commenced a subsequent procurement process involving a number of interested parties to identify a proposal which would not only achieve Council's goal for the delivery of its facilities, but also activate the site, and generate significant employment.

The project represents a significant development for the Forster town centre, providing high quality Council facilities capable of meeting the expectations and requirements of visitors and residents. Provision of Council facilities will also serve as a catalyst for further residential and commercial development, both within the site and across the broader town centre. The Project will provide an enhanced aesthetic and more vibrant town centre.

Q: How does the development agreement work?

The development agreement with Enyoc Pty Ltd provides that the developer will carry out and complete the design and construction of specified Council works at the Civic Centre site in Forster.

The development agreement requires the developer to complete the Council works in return for consideration of \$15.3 million. Payments are made to the developer progressively under the agreement having regard to the works undertaken at the time of each progress claim. Prior to each monthly payment, the claim is assessed by an independent certifier to confirm that the value of the works claimed have been completed.

The developer has engaged Global Construction Corporation Pty Ltd as its builder to carry out the Council works. However, all contractual obligations concerning the Council works rest with the developer, and Council is not a party to the building contract.

Due to the size and nature of the project, Council is not able to be the principal certifier for this project, and the developer has appointed a private certifier for this purpose. The private certifier (not Council) is responsible for building and construction compliance.

Q: What is the community space? Is this the performance space?

The community space primarily consists of four rooms and is approximately 800m² in area. It is a flexible space which will be able to accommodate up to 200 people (indoor and outdoor) and will be available for a variety of uses including meetings, performances, conferences, social gatherings and exhibitions.

A community foyer / atrium will adjoin the community space with an area of approximately 780m², which is intended to be a public gathering area incorporating informal casual seating for users to relax, socialise and access wifi.

Q: What's the return for Council?

Council acquired the site for \$3m in 2014.

Project costs for the development of the Council facilities is \$20.9 million (\$15.3m design and construction, \$3.5m furniture fixtures and equipment and AV/IT, \$2.1m contract variations).

To fund the Council facilities, Council received a \$6m grant from National Stronger Regions Fund (Federal Government), \$6m from Enyoc (\$3.3m works -in-kind and \$2.7m cash) with Council funding the remaining \$8.9m.

Q: What's in it for us?

In addition to providing a much-needed new library, customer service centre, visitor information centre and community space, it is expected that the provision of the Council facilities will enhance the economic, social and recreational wellbeing of the surrounding district. In addition, development of the 'residual land' (ie areas of the site not required for the Council facilities) by the Developer for residential, commercial and business purposes will complement the Council facilities and boost the local economy, generate employment and activate the site.

Q: Is there a conflict of interest for Council as it owns the site?

Whilst there is no restriction on Council being both landowner and consent authority in connection with the project, we have given serious consideration to the possibility of a conflict of interest arising. To minimise any potential conflict of interest arising, Council has appointed numerous advisors and consultants to assist with the project (including probity, legal, planning, quantity surveying, design and financial).

Importantly in connection with the development planning process (that Council would ordinarily be involved in as the consent authority), we have taken the following additional steps:

- appointment of an independent planning expert to review the Planning Proposal request from the Developer and prepare all necessary reports associated with that Planning Proposal (including the Planning Proposal itself). The NSW Government has been responsible for making a determination in connection with the Planning Proposal and ultimately varying the relevant planning control; and
- appointment of a second independent planning expert to review any DA lodged for the project and prepare a report for consideration by the Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP). The JRPP was then responsible for determining the DA and issuing the Development Approval.

Q: What are the economic benefits arising from the project?

The development will provide new Council facilities, residential, accommodation, retail, commercial and employment uses while delivering greater diversity and increased housing supply in the Forster Town Centre. It will encourage Forster to grow and provide impetus for further investment.

The development will facilitate the creation of approximately 236 jobs on site during construction and approximately 260 jobs on site on an on-going basis after completion of the whole development. Wages generated from these permanent jobs is expected to contribute around \$15.1m every year to the local economy.

Total spend in Forster-Tuncurry generated by new residents on site is expected to be around \$3.4m per annum. This development will also stimulate further interest and investment in the Forster-Tuncurry area.

Q: Why do we need a new library in Forster-Tuncurry?

The existing library simply cannot meet the demands of the expanding population in the area and the option to expand the existing library is not viable.

Arrangements to provide a new library to service the Forster- Tuncurry area have been in train for many years (well before the merger of the three former Councils).

The opportunity to develop a new library in conjunction with other public facilities including a customer service centre, visitor information centre and community space will maximise economies of scale created by combining those facilities.

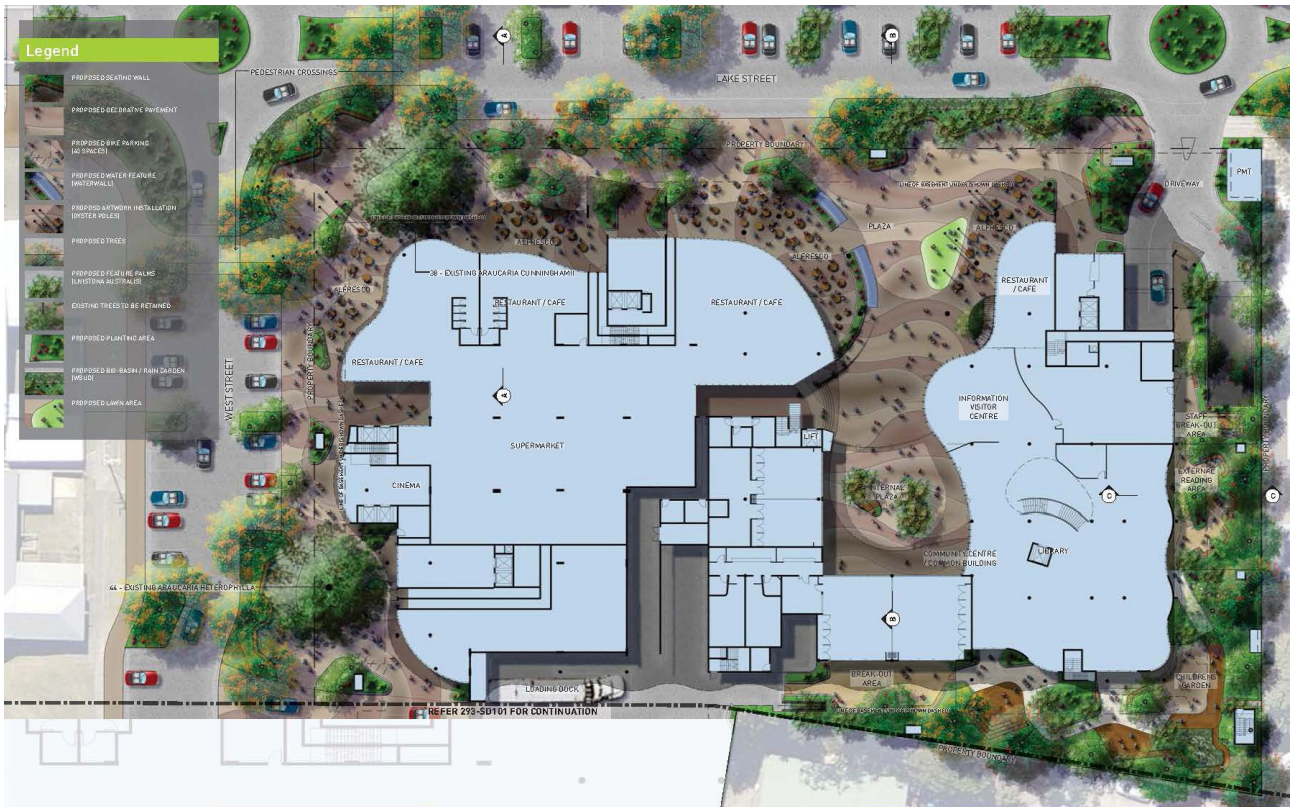
Q: What probity considerations has Council taken into account for the project?

At the commencement of the procurement processes (back in 2015), Council engaged the services of a probity advisor to oversee the project to ensure that the process was transparent, fair, accountable and compliant with procurement requirements.

Throughout the procurement arrangements, the probity advisor provided sign-off at the various milestones and confirmed the authenticity of the arrangements and that probity considerations have been addressed.

Q: When will the Forster Civic Centre open to the public?

The Council facilities within the Centre are scheduled to open to the public in October 2023.



Timeline

2007	Community identifies need for community space and library
2014	Council purchases old school site
November 2015	Federal Government provides \$6m grant funding to match Council funding
2015 – 2017	Procurement process to identify private sector developer
2016	Community consulted on uses for Council facilities
6 April 2017	NSW Government issue of Gateway
15 May 2017	Developer lodges DA
17 May – 16 June 2017	Public exhibition of planning proposal and DA and community consultations
August - September 2017	LEP gazetted and development approval
August 2017	Council and Developer execute Development Agreement
2017 – 2020	Planning approvals and construction phase
2023	Stage 1 project completion