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THE GOSFORD WATERFRONT – CUTTING THROUGH THE HYPE

As a long term resident of the Central Coast, I believe that the revitalisation of Gosford is a crucial component in the creation of a vibrant, economically robust and sustainable region. For many years Gosford was seen by many of its residents as failing to reach its huge potential, however right now, there is an opportunity to redress this situation and take a path towards real social and economic growth.

The identification of this path began in 2008 with the development of the Gosford City Centre Masterplan “Our City, Our Destiny”. This blueprint for transformation was funded and developed as a partnership between the NSW Government and Gosford City Council, with unprecedented community involvement.

Since then, further planning has been guided by this blueprint and has resulted in 10 hectares of the Gosford Waterfront being gazetted as a Site of State Significance (SSS).

The SSS is unequivocal about its vision for the Waterfront:

“The Gosford Waterfront will be a vibrant and active mixed use precinct that will connect the Gosford City Centre to the Brisbane Water foreshore. New residential development will contribute to the State Government’s regional housing targets for the Central Coast, and will take advantage of Gosford’s unique water based setting. The Gosford Waterfront will also be a vibrant centre for jobs, and offer regional office opportunities for large business and corporations near a locally based skilled workforce.”

As part of the SSS process, the former public school site was rezoned for mixed use development. This provides for more flexible use of the site and also facilitates private investor development funding.

To complement and further facilitate private investment, both the NSW and Federal Governments have announced programs which will greatly contribute to Gosford’s revitalisation:

- The decision by Federal Government to create 600 new ATO jobs in Gosford, to be housed in a purpose built facility developed through private sector investment;
- A NSW Government pledge of \$10 million towards a Regional Performing Arts Centre as proposed via an architecture competition held in 2013;
- More than \$360 million in NSW Government funding towards the growth and renewal of Gosford Hospital.

However I believe recent community concerns regarding the Gosford Waterfront Development warrant some comment.

Unfortunately, a number of misconceptions lie at the heart of many of these concerns, so I would like to provide some clarity around the role of the Central Coast Regional Development Corporation and the Waterfront Development.

Here are some of the issues raised in recent times:

Misconception: *Gosford Public School was moved on the promise it would be replaced by a Performing Arts Centre.*

The reality is that the urban planning reason for moving the school was to link the city to its waterfront by creating an activated street-scape. This was the express community wish which emanated from the Gosford Challenge. The site itself was also too restrictive for the needs of a modern school.

The extension of Baker Street provides a clear pedestrian link from the city to the water. Being able to see where you are going increases feelings of safety, builds community and promotes walking. At the moment the walk from the city centre to the waterfront is long and lonely.

The school site, in particular, was the focus of special attention because this area represented the greatest potential for attracting private investment leading to the creation of much needed additional employment as thus economic stimulus for Gosford. However, CCRDC and its partners recognised that the site needed to incorporate a balance between corporate/commercial requirements and the provision of community facilities and recreation areas. The Department of Education was also entitled to receive a fair return for its land to further invest in education facilities across NSW.

The proposed siting of the building to accommodate the ATO is not being built on land that was designated for a Performing Arts Centre. During the Gosford Challenge, the elected community representatives recommended that the Performing Arts Centre be located much closer to the waterfront to create a pedestrian destination that linked the city with its waterfront.

The site proposed in the 2013 architecture competition was closer to the water still, across the road from Iguana's. Plans were developed for this site, with consultation with Friends of the Performing Arts, Gosford City Council and many others, with the State Government allocating \$10 million towards the build.

Misconception: *The ATO needs take precedence ahead of community benefits.*

The reality is that in the future, the walk from Georgiana Terrace to the waterfront will be an interesting amble past a range of shopfronts, cafes and bars. The building that will house the Commonwealth staff will provide the first component of that active street frontage.

The great news is that the commitment of the Commonwealth to placing 600 new jobs in Gosford will be a huge stimulus to the area and be a critical component to the revitalisation of Gosford.

The Central Coast Regional Development Corporation recognised that private investors would be reluctant to take the risk on development of the school site unless there was a major commercial organisation willing to take a long term tenancy in a Waterfront building. It was a CCRDC priority to secure an anchor tenant in the first stage of development and this has been realised through strong lobbying by both the Corporation and Gosford City Council.

Misconception: *The CCRDC is the Developer of the site*

The CCRDC is not the landowner, nor the investor or developer. CCRDC's role has been to work with key stakeholders to formulate a framework for the redevelopment of the area, hence the creation of a Site of State Significance. The SSS, including the re-zoning and the Development Control Plan incorporated within it, give a very clear vision and specific requirements for the site. This intent is clear, the development should provide for both community benefit as well as corporate facilities. The rezoning and the DCP were formally endorsed by Gosford City Council and supported by other key groups such as the Gosford Chamber of Commerce. Notwithstanding these measures, the rezoning and DCP also allows for private developer interpretation of the vision, in recognition that to be overly prescriptive could inhibit creativity, investment attractiveness and tenant interest.

Now that the SSS process has been completed and the school buildings removed, the process has now moved out of CCRDC's area of responsibility, with Government Property NSW negotiating with the private sector on the sale and development of the former school site. CCRDC remains interested and will offer advice where possible, continually striving for an optimum outcome. It is important to note that it is NSW Government policy to hand development over to the private sector since development is not the role of government.

I think most of us understand that there is still much work to be done, including the submission of plans for development application (DA) approval and an opportunity for further community comment at this time. For those who wish to read a full transcript of the Development Control Plan, it is available on the CCRDC web site at www.ccrdc.nsw.gov.au.

I am delighted that the community is engaged and interested in this project and encourage people to offer constructive comments based on reality rather than on rumours or perceptions. We must remember however, that without the ability to attract private investment to Gosford, the revitalisation aspirations will remain just that - aspirations.

Graeme Inchley, Chairman
CCRDC

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