

Quality Development on the Coast: Gosford RSL Club



Designed by **WMK Architecture** and with construction being carried out by local contractor **North Construction & Building**, the major redevelopment at **Gosford RSL Club** continues to surge ahead.

With the community eager to experience all of their new offerings when **the new Club opens in early 2024**, we spoke to the teams behind this landmark project about all of the **exciting changes in store**.

Gosford RSL is embarking on an extensive redevelopment project that sees the new Club being built on the current carpark, adjacent to the Central Coast Highway. How was the decision made to construct an entirely new venue?

Gosford RSL Club: Almost 10 years ago, it became obvious that the current Gosford RSL Club wasn't going to satisfy the needs of our members and our community for the long-term.

We did look at extending the current building; however, that would have meant that we'd be stuck with the legacy issues we needed to address.

The decision to build an entirely new building was a huge step. We started by looking at some very rough, 'big picture' feasibility options for the new building. As they stacked up quite well, we started to dive into more detail and the project gained momentum.

The key step in the process was a Site Relocation and Product Strategy report produced by [Tully Heard Consultants](#). We engaged in extensive research and community consultation, and held workshops with our members, staff and other stakeholders, and this really set the tone for the future of the Club.

Once we had this strategy document, we were able to engage our project manager and brief the architects, whilst also being able to reference, adjust and recalculate our feasibility model.



Architectural renders of the new Gosford RSL Club

It was extremely important throughout the process that we built in checkpoints or gateways where we stopped to check that we were on the right track, review the financial models, the projections and the product strategy, and make a conscious decision to proceed.

We didn't want to get to a point where we became so emotionally invested in the project that we weren't making rational decisions. We made sure there was always the option to stop and recalibrate or redirect.

The Club has been designed to be a significant building that marks West Gosford as the 'gateway to Gosford' and the wider Central Coast. Can you tell us more about this vision?

Gosford RSL Club: We take our role in the community very seriously. As a registered Club, we are owned by our 25,000+ members - most of whom are local residents. Effectively, we are a community-owned asset. Therefore, it was incredibly important that our new building delivered what our community wanted in a hospitality venue, but we also wanted to build something that residents could be proud of.

In fact, the first line of our brief to WMK Architecture was to 'create something that Gosford and the Central Coast will be proud of', and needless to say, we are absolutely delighted with the design that they came up with.

We want to be an aspirational yet approachable venue: the kind of place that you can go once or twice a week for an affordable meal or a drink with friends, but also the place where you want to take your out-of-town friends, or go with a group for a special occasion.

We just can't wait to see the reaction from Gosford and the Central Coast when the scaffolding comes down!

WMK Architecture: Our response to the brief was to develop a new Club building that was both an elegant response suitable for its gateway address, and also an enduring addition to Gosford's urban fabric. The Central Coast is amassed with gorgeous beaches and magnificent national parks, and the design draws reference from local surroundings, relying on natural formations and local materials to deliver a design response true to the area.

An interiors palette combining warm coastal colours, textures and undertones has also been used, which will create a sophisticated yet casual and relaxed atmosphere.



The Ground Breaking Ceremony at Gosford RSL Club

The \$45 million upgrade will see the club transformed into a contemporary space that you say will embrace and build community, and drive the local economy forward.

Can you explain some of the specific ways you think the redevelopment will achieve this?

Gosford RSL Club: We are passionate about our community, but it is also integral that our Board of Directors and leadership team deliver value for our members with a project like this.

We were so happy that the proposal from North Construction stood head and shoulders above the rest. Working with a local builder was step one in using our redevelopment to support and help drive our local economy.

As you've said – the project is well over \$45M, and it's great to be able to direct the majority of that back into the Central Coast, because North use a majority of local suppliers as well.

Then there is the workforce on the project. Again, most of these people are Central Coast residents who get to work on a great local project, and avoid having to hit the freeway down to Sydney every day.

North Construction & Building: During construction, we have engaged a significant number of local subcontractors and suppliers. Many of the subcontractors working on the project were members of the Club prior to construction commencing, and look forward to continuing their membership in the new Club.

We recently achieved a significant milestone of over 100 workers on site per day.

Gosford RSL Club: When we open the new Club, we expect to increase our staffing numbers by about 25-30%, so we'll go from our current workforce of about 150, up to around 200 staff.

We like to source local produce and ingredients whenever we can, too, and this will continue to be a focus in the new building.

The new Club also has a Conference and Events Centre, which will be one of the largest and most flexible on the Coast. It will help bring more tourism to our region through conferences, expos and weddings, and will also provide a great venue for local events.



Architectural renders of the new Gosford RSL Club

We're particularly excited to see the elevated outdoor terrace come to life, as well as the newly established microbrewery.

It's so important that a venue like this has multiple food options catering to families and groups of all sizes. Would you say the venue's hospitality offerings have been given a renewed focus in this redevelopment project?

Gosford RSL Club: When we developed our product strategy for the new Club, the emphasis was clear that this was to be a 'food and beverage' venue. This means we'll be offering a range of different cuisines and food styles, with differing décor and atmosphere throughout the venue.

There will be spaces that families feel comfortable in, including a kids' play area, as well as areas that suit a quieter, more formal dinner. We'll have great spaces for groups and parties, too, and that's not to mention the huge terrace that everyone will be talking about!

[OakHaven Brewery](#) is a huge part of our food and beverage strategy. We started our brewery about five years ago with the aim of providing fresh, easy-drinking beers for our patrons at an affordable price.

The beers have been really gaining in popularity, and they've won awards in Australian and international beer competitions but we're struggling to keep up supply. Luckily, the brewery that will be in the new Club has about eight times the capacity of the current system.

The redevelopment is scheduled for completion early next year. What's been the most exciting progress milestone you've hit so far?

Gosford RSL Club: There are so many milestones that have felt very significant along the way, but the topping out ceremony was pretty amazing.

It did feel like it had taken a long time to get to that stage, so it was a great moment to stand up on the top of the building and see how far it had come.

North Construction & Building: The dropping of a significant portion of the scaffolding on the northern elevation of the building was a standout for us.

Whilst the scaffold was in place, it was easy to become complacent about what has been getting constructed within the site boundaries. Removing it allowed the public to get their first glimpse at what the new Club will look like on completion.

As Gosford RSL Club's trusted building partner, the North Construction & Building team has kept the project on track despite COVID-19 lockdowns, staff shortages and flooding rains. How have you managed to overcome these major challenges?

North Construction & Building: Fortunately, we have been able to collaborate with WMK Architecture to ensure that specific product and material selections were chosen to minimise lead times wherever possible. From a procurement perspective, this has been critical to managing the many supply chain issues that were being experienced at the peak of the pandemic.

We engaged a significant number of local subcontractors for the new RSL, too - many of whom we have longstanding relationships with. This allowed us to secure local resources and provide employment for subcontractors without them having to commute from Sydney or Newcastle.

Weather has been a significant challenge for the project, and we have worked to mitigate the effects of the rain as much as possible. The new building is situated on the site of the previous asphalt carpark, and we left the asphalt in place for as long as we possibly could to provide a hardstand area to work off.

There's a real push for new developments to fit in seamlessly with the environment around them. How have you taken this into account in this redevelopment project?

WMK Architecture: We particularly like the covered outdoor terrace, which allows the Club to open up the large bi-fold doors in any weather. It helps to blur the line between inside and outside, and allows patrons to enjoy Central Coast's comfortable climate.

How have you kept staff and the wider community informed and on board throughout the duration of the project?

Gosford RSL Club: At the start of the project, we worked with North on the importance of keeping our staff, members and the community engaged throughout.

We set up a couple of time-lapse cameras that we can grab stills from and make videos, and North have also used drones on several occasions to get different views and perspectives of the build.

We generally provide our members with a monthly update via our Club newsletter, giving them as much interesting information as we can.

North have been really great about allowing us to organise site tours for staff every couple of months, too, which has been wonderful for staff morale and engagement.

It's clear that this truly is a work of collaboration and a labour of love for all parties involved.

Gosford RSL Club: Yes - this landmark redevelopment has certainly been a combined effort, and we can't wait to open our doors to our patrons and the broader Central Coast community next year.



Hammering in the first peg on the original Gosford RSL Club, 1973



Gosford is often considered the 'gateway to the Central Coast'



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