

Bathers Way - Newcastle Beach

November 2018

What is proposed for Newcastle Beach?

The Bathers Way - Newcastle Beach is the largest and most complex stage of the Bathers Way project. This stage will transform a dormant section of our coastline into a vibrant and attractive space for tourists and the wider community.

Proposed for the stretch between King Edward Park and Newcastle Surf Life Saving Club are significant upgrades to the existing skate park, a new skate bowl, exercise equipment, access improvements, new amenities, a kiosk and inclusion of a community hub in the redevelopment of the Newcastle Beach Pavilion.

The key objectives of the project are to:

- Promote healthy lifestyles and encourage active transport by connecting the city and suburban beaches to the CBD and public transport nodes
- Provide recreational facilities to support youth activities and community space for hire
- Improve accessibility and safety for all users and provide facilities which encourage participation by those with physical impairment
- Promote economic investment, tourism and events to attract people to live, work, visit and invest in the area
- Reduce ongoing maintenance costs
- Contribute to a number of local, state and federal strategic and policy objectives.

The project is divided into two stages, as follows:

Stage 1: The Bathers Way and recreational facilities

- Construction of the Bathers Way shared path from Shortland Esplanade to King Edward Park
- Improved lighting, seating, viewing and accessibility
- Indigenous artwork and interpretive signage
- Parking, landscaping and accessibility improvements
- New intermediate skate park and bowl
- New fitness equipment, shade, seating, and viewing areas
- Café/kiosk and accessible amenities
- Improved access to South Newcastle Beach and King Edward Park.

Stage 2: Newcastle Community Hub (subject to funding)

- Demolition of the existing Surf Life Saving Pavilion
- Provision of new community building
- New café/kiosk, accessible amenities and showers
- New landscaping, shade and seating
- Improved access between Newcastle Beach and CBD.

What is the timeframe for this project?

Design and documentation is now underway for all stages of the project. Stage 1 documentation is expected to be completed early in 2019 following community consultation, with construction commencing around July. Construction is likely to take between 12 and 18 months.

Detailed design for Stage 2 will commence following consultation in December 2018, and is expected to take around 12 months. Construction of stage 2 is dependent on securing additional funding.

How much will it cost?

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$17 million. City of Newcastle has committed \$5.7 million over three financial years towards construction, with an additional \$5.3 million in external funding secured through the Restart NSW Resources for Regions Program and partnership with the Newcastle Surf Life Saving Club. The remaining \$6 million has been requested through the Australian Government's Building Better Regions Fund.

Why are we proposing demolition of the Surf Club?

In 2014, the City undertook an analysis of all our Coastal buildings, to determine how well they were performing. The criteria for the analysis included building condition, response to the urban environment, needs of the community (including Surf Life Saving) and compliance with current standards for access and egress. The report recommended the building be replaced with a new community facility.

Further consultation will be undertaken for the proposed new facility, and a strategic business case will be also be developed to inform the next stages of design. Demolition of the existing building and construction of the new facility are subject to funding.

The area to the South of the Surf Club isn't really utilised and attracts anti-social behaviour, why would we build here?

The area between King Edward Park and Newcastle SLSC is predominantly remnant road infrastructure and most of the adjacent assets such as amenities, skate park, stairs and paths are at the end of their life and beyond repair. This results in poor amenity and leads to decreased usage and increased anti-social behaviour due to a lack of passive surveillance.

By renewing deteriorated infrastructure and investing in new facilities, the area becomes a vibrant and attractive place to visit, and the resulting increase in usage leads to increased surveillance and a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

The completed sections of the Bathers Way have seen a 50% increase in usage, with Merewether one of the busiest areas along the coastal stretch due to the additional facilities provided. We are expecting a similar transformation as a result of the Newcastle Beach infrastructure renewal project, by re-activating this dormant section of our coastline and providing community facilities for all to enjoy.

Will there be more car parking?

No new parking will be provided in addition to the on-street parking available adjacent to the site, however a drop off zone is provided as part of the new works to assist those with mobility issues to access the site.

The Bathers Way is wheelchair accessible between Newcastle Beach and Nobbys Beach and the site is in close proximity to the new light rail terminus near Pacific Park.

There is a history of cliff instability near the proposed Bathers Way path, will it be safe?

Geotechnical investigations have been carried out as part of the planning process, which determined that the current rock-catch fence and previous cliff stabilisation works provide sufficient protection from rock fall risk to the south of the site.

Additional scaling and grooming of the northern extent of the cliff will be undertaken as part of this project, and the rock catch fence will be extended.

Periodic inspections will be undertaken by a geotechnical engineer to identify and manage new risks as they emerge in the future.

There is a skate bowl at Empire Park already, why do we need another one?

The Empire Beach skate park provides for a high skill level, and has limited street-style facilities. The new skate park at Newcastle Beach will be suitable for all ages and abilities and includes two bowls - one for beginners and one intermediate level as well as a large plaza area, all of which are wheelchair accessible from the Bathers Way.

The skate bowl is on the beach, will this result in beach erosion?

During the concept design phase, we requested expert analysis of the proposal in relation to any potential adverse impacts on the beach, particularly erosion. A draft coastal engineering report was prepared to determine the level of risk involved in placing infrastructure eastward of the existing seawall. The report considered:

- Impacts on the beach with regards to sand and wave movement;
- Compounding impacts of coastal processes on adjoining infrastructure;
- Maximum foreseeable water level; and
- Wave impact forces on the proposed structure.

To assess the structure's impact on coastal processes and vice-versa, the report used wave climate data (wave height, frequency and direction) collected over the past 25 years, combined with historical records of beach erosion and storm activity. Factors such as storm surge, astronomical tides, wave run-up and predicted sea level rise were included in the analysis.

The report found that the initial design of the bowl could result in localized scouring (erosion) at either end of bowl during a major weather event, and suggested modifications to the design to mitigate this issue.

The suggestions included locating the bowl within the two eastern-most points of the existing sea wall, stepping the face of the sea wall to dissipate wave energy, and providing a more gradual transition back to the sea wall. These changes have been incorporated into the current design which addresses the potential issue of localized scouring. The City will also review and finalise the coastal engineering report to ensure that the proposed skate bowl does not negatively impact on the beach and coastline, and can adequately withstand storm events.

Will the structure be damaged during storms?

The draft engineering report included an analysis of potential wave impact forces on the structure. This was used to determine the structural design parameters required to ensure the structure is fit for purpose and can withstand wave impact in severe weather events.

Why the structure is only designed to last 50 years?

Australian Standards apply to structures and materials used in marine environments to ensure durability, and all structures are designed for a minimum 50 year design life.

A 50-year design life is the maximum that is able to be certified by an engineer for any project. The Australian Standards which apply to the design of modern day structures in coastal environments result in structures which are far more durable than others which were constructed along the coast in the early 1900's, including the Newcastle and Merewether ocean baths, and the South Newcastle seawall. These structures are heavily impacted by coastal processes and have only recently reached the point where intervention is required. Specifying a 50 year design life does not mean the structure will only last 50 years.

Will the bowl fill up with sand?

The bowl will be subject to sand and water ingress during severe weather events, which is the case for all of our coastal assets. This has been taken into account, and appropriate drainage incorporated into the design.

As for sand build-up, we will work with the skateboarding community, as we have done at Empire Park for many years, to ensure that the facilities remain safe and usable for all to enjoy.

What is the consultation process?

At the commencement of the Coastal Revitalisation Program, a steering committee was established to oversee the implementation of Coastal Revitalisation Projects. The Coastal Revitalisation Consultative Committee (CRCC) includes the Lord Mayor and Councillors, CEO and senior management, and representatives from NSW Primary Industry (Lands) and Hunter Surf Life Saving, and meets regularly to discuss project proposals, including the Newcastle Beach Project.

In 2015, an expression of interest was called for interested parties to join the Bathers Way Community Reference Group, which was established for projects associated with the Bathers Way. Council holds meetings with the CRG to understand the needs of the community during the initial design phase, and to keep the community informed of upcoming works. The project has been on hold for nearly 2 years, and as such the CRG did not meet in this time. The CRG will now reconvene to provide input into this project.

Wider community consultation will also be undertaken in December 2018 to enable a broader cross section of the community to provide feedback on the proposed project.

A focus group made up of members of the Newcastle skating community was formed to provide input into the design of the skate park and bowl component of the project. The members of the focus group were selected to ensure that all aspects of skate park use were considered, including wheelchair use, and family-friendly facilities which complemented existing facilities at Empire Park. The proposed design was developed after thorough consultation with the focus group and caters for the maximum number and type of users.

Is a Development Application required for this project?

The approval process is governed by legislation, and is not a discretionary matter. If a Development Application is required, a Development Application must be lodged. But if another legislative framework applies, such as a State Planning Policy, then approval through the Development Application process would result in an approval which has no legal standing.

We rely on advice from independent experts in planning to determine which legislation applies to ensure our projects follow the correct approval process.

At this stage, the final approval pathway has not been determined. If a Development Application is required, the plans will be publicly exhibited for comment as part of the approval process.