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The shape of things to come in new CBD

Pivotal 53ha commercial site to drive region growth

By **ERLE LEVEY**

THE new Maroochydore CBD is helping to shape the Sunshine Coast's future.

New streets, cycle paths, walkways and an urban square are starting to take shape, breathing life into the heart of the region.

With infrastructure now coming out of the ground and becoming very visible, it's important that those tasked with the responsibility of developing the 53ha greenfield CBD site get it right.

SunCentral CEO John Knaggs is excited by the challenge, and points to the generations that will benefit from the jobs created on such a prime site.

It is a game-changer for the future with the Sunshine Coast inevitably headed for a population 500,000.

"It's exciting to work on ... for the team I lead and all the contractors working on it," Mr Knaggs said.

That has been right from 2008-10 when the site went from a concept to reality, from a golf club to council understanding that the 53ha needed to come into play as a commercial hub.

The move was controversial at the time yet the golf club was successfully relocated to Maroochy North Shore.

It was a critical time. Action was needed to be taken and council voted a number of times on the issue.

With the global financial crisis, there was not a worse time to look at a major infrastructure project. But it served as an example of the type of action needed.

"The GFC hit this community very, very hard," Mr Knaggs said. "Mum and Dad businesses and the like were all impacted on, and deeper in this region, than a lot of people really appreciated.

"Any major urban project to generate jobs was welcome, to grow the regional economy in much deeper ways beyond the current high performers of retail, construction and tourism.

"Fundamentally, it is an economic development play. This will create 15,000 long-term jobs directly as a contemporary new CBD when it comes out of the ground.

"It gives a long-term impetus to the Sunshine Coast."

While being described as Australia's only greenfield business site it was difficult to give comparisons, Mr Knaggs said.

Docklands adjoins the main CBD of Melbourne and it is the same with Southbank at Brisbane.

"What's critical is that we have a regional city, not a capital city that has the power and grunt of traditional real estate markets and a capital city economy behind it.

"You don't have that on the Sunshine Coast unless it is a residential development.

"The private sector would not have brought it out of the ground the way a government can. They do not have the patient capital required."

Local government has understood what is needed for the Maroochydore site but the Queensland government role has been very important in other ways.

It is the planning authority for what is in effect local government land so it was important in governance of critical strategies for council to keep at arms length. And be investment-ready for third parties.

Maroochydore, like Aura at Caloundra South, is a priority development area to accelerate economic growth.

Mr Knaggs said that with installation of underground infrastructure in the first stage of the project almost complete, a pivotal point in the project has been reached.

Great progress is also being made on other fronts, with interest received in 80% of lots in the core commercial precinct.

Mr Knaggs said negotiations were under way with a range of parties and construction of the first buildings on the site was expected to start later this year and into 2019.



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GOOD FOUNDATIONS: Development of the new Maroochydore CBD is moving to the next stage with initial ground work and infrastructure being put in place. PHOTO: PATRICK WOODS