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The GPT Group had a vision, to fully transform Charlestown Square into a thriving community meeting place, with a diverse and expansive retail offer that connected to the surrounding CBD and spoke directly to the local community. The demand for this transformation was evident. At the time of the redevelopment, the community lacked a major focal point, it was devoid of a main retail, leisure and entertainment hub. Charlestown Square was experiencing escape expenditure because the community was travelling two hours south to Sydney to shop for fashion and to satisfy entertainment and leisure desires. Despite these factors the Centre had a history of being one of the strongest performers in Australia, based on speciality MAT, however GPT knew it could deliver more to the community and in turn more to its shareholders. It could respond to the desires of a growing community. The Centre's trade area boasted strong investment fundamentals with the local population growing by 5,250 people each year and retail spend growing on average by 4.5% per year.

The redevelopment faced many challenges, a significant portion of public and private land needed to be acquired to make the masterplan possible and six development applications were submitted in the process. It took a period of five years to achieve the required land deals and approvals necessary for the development to proceed. The local bowling club, football fields and even roads had to be acquired. Community engagement and masterplanning were critical to the success of the project as extensive community land was being utilised to deliver a heart to a growing community. GPT recognised that for this redevelopment to be a success the community needed to inform the overall facilities and design.

The redevelopment masterplan was prepared by Canadian-based Joe Hruda of Civitas Design, in conjunction with GPT and focused on the expansion of the existing centre (to almost double its size) and the integration of the development with the urban fabric of the Charlestown town centre. GPT and Civitas set out to create an internal environment based on the principles of the world’s ‘Great Shopping Streets’ and adopted 10 of these principles, including spatial clarity, building facade expression, controlled clutter, open to the sky, building diversity, embracing the outdoors, authentic materials, unobtrusive walkways, supportive streetscapes and street events. This was further enhanced by extensive internal and external landscaping to set the quality of the space.

Connection to the fabric of the wider Charlestown town centre was critical and achieved by transforming the adjacent Pearson Street pedestrian mall into a working street, bringing social integration and better business potential. This significantly transformed the public domain and in turn has served as a catalyst for the revitalisation of the greater Charlestown area.

A sense of community connection was at the forefront of design; delivering a sensitive and authentic blend of Charlestown’s local heritage while celebrating the region’s future and the best it has to offer.

A detailed place study (Interpretative Strategy) was completed through extensive community consultation and research into the local region where key themes informed design and material selection; chosen to reflect the natural beauty and cultural markers of the region.

GPT undertook extensive negotiations with Lake Macquarie City Council, the community and the members of the local Charlestown Bowling Club, to successfully acquire the community land and roads required for the development footprint accounting for the proposed new facilities. An extensive community investment package was agreed with Council to enable the expansion of Charlestown Square. As part of the development of Charlestown Square, GPT also delivered a range of new community facilities that included a state of the art Lawn Bowling Club, two new football fields and 300 seat grandstand, a youth and community centre and a new 40 place childcare centre. In addition GPT assisted local council with the design and construction of community facilities at Charlestown oval.

On completion of the redevelopment to today, GPT has delivered its vision. Charlestown Square is undoubtedly the heart of the Lake Macquarie, it’s a meeting place to celebrate the heritage, diversity and future of the region. It’s the regional centre for community activities, entertaining, socialising and shopping. The project has significantly transformed the public domain and in turn served as a catalyst for the revitalisation of the greater Charlestown area.

**ENTRY SUMMARY**

**PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS**

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**DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW**

- $470 million dollars invested and 110 additional specialty stores delivered
- Increase of approximately 41,000 square metres of retail space (total of approximately 88,000 square metres)
- Introduction of a new Fresh Food and Convenience Market featuring two full line supermarkets
- Delivery of an outdoor entertainment and dining precinct, the South Piazza
- Low-carbon electricity generation including gas fuel-source cogeneration to serve the electricity demands for the centre and its tenants
- Creation of a new 1,000 seat food terrace
- Approximately 1,250 new retail positions post construction and 1,300 direct jobs during construction
- Building work commenced 2008, completed 2010
IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU FEEL THAT OTHER DEVELOPERS CAN BENEFIT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE?

The three key areas of benefit to other developers include:

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When planning the redevelopment of Charlestown Square, GPT set out to deliver a Centre that directly responded to its community, its wants, needs and aspirations. The community requested a central meeting place for community activities, entertaining, socialising and shopping.

Community engagement was critical to the success of the project as extensive community land needed to be acquired to redevelop the Centre. GPT recognised that for this redevelopment to be a success the community needed to inform the overall facilities and design. Therefore extensive community consultation over a number of years informed the design of the new Centre, spearheaded by Charlestown Square’s Community Reference Group.

Charlestown Square’s Community Reference Group included approximately 15 influential members of the local community, who met on a monthly basis during the development to provide the Centre team with insight into the community’s aspirations and feedback on the project. Throughout the redevelopment over 200 community members attended development tours, 90,000 homes in the trade area received quarterly newsletter updates, weekly updates where printed in the local newspaper and an open door policy existed between Centre management and the community. By the time the development was complete the community felt a true sense of connection to the Centre.

Despite the major development phases having now been delivered, GPT sees the Community Reference Group’s ongoing role as crucial in ensuring the Centre’s future success. The quality of this partnership is evident post development with a view to openly changing the terms of reference for their engagement to continue.

SUSTAINABILITY INNOVATIONS

GPT took a best practice approach to ecologically sustainable design at Charlestown Square, introducing Australia’s first retail solar thermal cooling plant (with funding support from the NSW Government’s Renewable Energy Development Program) and a cogeneration plant (with funding support from the NSW Government’s Climate Change Fund).

The combined benefit of these energy initiatives and additional sustainable endeavours is forecast to reduce Charlestown Square’s eco-footprint by over 50 per cent. The solar thermal system is expected to produce an estimated 200kw of cooling for the centre at peak output and will reduce conventional cooling electricity use by 77,000 kwh/annum.

The natural gas fired cogeneration plant generates the majority of electricity consumed by GPT’s Charlestown Square, inclusive of retail tenants. It reduces Charlestown Square’s reliance on the national grid for electricity and allows the Centre to feed surplus energy back to the national grid.

Electricity generated onsite is sold to tenants at a discount to the NSW electricity market rates. This entrepreneurial move delivers environmental savings to the Centre by reducing the entire building’s carbon impact (as opposed to just the base building), while also bringing cost benefits to tenants.

URBAN FABRIC INTEGRATION

The concept for Charlestown Square was developed around the principle that shopping centres need to be transformed from being purely introverted, to one which recognises its larger community role as gathering space. This was achieved by literally turning the plan outward in the form of a major public activity space and creating a shopping experience that reflects the principles of great shopping streets rather than traditional malls.

The new design demonstrates this by offering the community more reasons (above just shopping) to visit the Centre. For example the new South Piazza is the Centre’s dining and entertainment precinct. Here, visitors can take in a movie, go ten pin bowling, relax under a tree reading the newspaper and watching the world go by, or share an after work drink and stay on for dinner. The Piazza extends the centre’s day to 18 hours and realises its aspiration of a true town centre.

The project has significantly transformed the public domain and in turn served as a catalyst for the revitalisation of the greater Charlestown area.

DESCRIBE THE FINANCING INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT

The GPT Group invested $470 million in redeveloping Charlestown Square, which the Group 100% owns and manages. The investment was funded solely by The GPT Group. Completed in late 2010, the investment has added approximately 41,000 sqm and provided a new retail, entertainment and community destination for the Hunter Region of NSW.
EXPLAIN WHY THE OWNER DECIDED TO RENOVATE OR EXPAND THE CENTRE.

Charlestown Square was originally developed in the 1970's and featured typical characteristics of Centres designed within this era. The Centre was located in the heart of a trade area that lacked a major community focal point, devoid of a main retail, leisure and entertainment hub. The Centre had been expanded several times over the years, however these expansions where undertaken without masterplanning and collectively led to constraining the future performance of the Centre. Although the centre was trading well and had no strong competition it was no longer satisfying market demand.

Charlestown Square was 46,800 sqm, with 160 specialty tenants. The Centre had fundamental deficiencies in product range particularly in the areas of fashion and fresh food, car parking, access and navigation. The Centre is located in the Lower Hunter Region of NSW, approximately two hours drive north of Sydney. The Hunter is one of Australia’s economic powerhouses, with total trade area expected to increase by around 2,100 households every year. The trade area boasts strong investment fundamentals, with this development directly responding to the needs of a growing and gentrifying community.

DESCRIBE HOW THE RENOVATION OR EXPANSION ALTERED THOSE CONDITIONS.

At the opening of the redevelopment in 2010, Charlestown Square had successfully integrated with the wider Charlestown town centre and become the heart of its trade area. It was now the regional hub for community activities, entertaining, socialising and shopping.

On day one of opening, local families filled the Centre and in particular flocked to the dining and entertainment precinct, the South Piazza. Here, parents watched on from restaurants as their children happily played in the water fountains, designed for this exact activity. It was evident that the masterplan had worked. GPT had successfully restored Charlestown Square’s retail fundamentals through the correct mix of retail offer, entertainment solutions and free spaces to relax and read a newspaper or in the children’s example play in the water fountain. Charlestown Square had become a true town centre.

At completion Charlestown Square had almost doubled in size to a total of approximately 88,000 sqm of retail space. The expansion introduced an additional 110 specialty stores, 5 new mini-majors, a department store, two discount department stores, a new fresh food and convenience market hall featuring two full line supermarkets, an outdoor entertainment and dining precinct including a new Cinema, a new 1,000 seat food terrace and a further 1,000 convenient car parking spaces to deliver a new total of 3,500.

The Centre celebrated the following success post development

• GLA moved from 74th to 25th largest Centre in Australia
• MAT was $340 million, moving the Centre 22 places to number 52
• MAT/m2 was $7,423, placing the Centre as 12th best performing Centre in Australia
• Speciality MAT/m2 was $10, 880, placing the Centre as 6th best performing Centre in Australia

Source: Shopping Centre News Big Guns 2009

A number of new community facilities were also delivered, including two new football fields and a grandstand, state-of-the-art lawn bowling greens and clubhouse, childcare facility, youth and community centre and an upgrade of the urban streetscape to improve connectivity to the CBD.

The project significantly transformed the public domain and in turn has served as a catalyst for the revitalisation of the greater Charlestown area.

"The redevelopment of Charlestown Square and the surrounding precinct presented significant challenges, but even greater opportunities for the owner, GPT and for the community. The outcome of the process has been hugely successful with a first class shopping centre within the public realm. This redevelopment raised the bar on how projects such as this can deliver to the benefit of the community overall." Mayor of Lake Macquarie, Greg Piper.
Top: Pre development aerial view
Middle: Centre context plan
Bottom from left: New childcare centre, football field and lawn bowling club
WHAT ARE THE KEY REASONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT? WHY?

GPT successfully restored Charlestown Square's retail fundamentals through the correct mix of retail, dining, entertainment and free community spaces. Charlestown Square has become a true town centre.

Two important observations can be made at Charlestown Square since the redevelopment to support its success, these are the “Power of Free” and “Deferred Decisions”.

To achieve the “Power of Free”, you need a space where customers are not obligated to buy and where people feel empowered and entitled to be there. It is an area for shared experiences. For example Charlestown Square's fountain area in the South Piazza, encourages children to play in the water with lots of areas for parents to sit and enjoy spending time with their children. No transaction is required to be there. However by spending time in this area parents are likely to spend longer in the Centre, return to the centre more frequently and become loyal advocates of the Centre.

Deferred Decision are the freedom of leaving yourself open for the unplanned. For example the Centre's South Piazza is lined with restaurants, the deferred decision here is that people are visiting Charlestown Square not knowing where they will dine, they will decide when they get there.

The fact that these two observations can be made at Charlestown Square are evident that GPT has successfully integrated the retail fundamentals with the correct layers of design, from urban planning to placemaking.

In the new Centre design, different members of the local community have been catered for through customised precincts. For example youth fashion is grouped together on the ground level and has an urban and grungy design feel, or if you are a parent visiting the Centre with children you are made to feel welcome with an internal children's play area, the Secret Garden and children stores which are bundled together and surrounded by bright colours, giant size flowers and striped umbrellas. Here we take a detailed look at the precincts:

SOUTH PIAZZA

Charlestown Square's South Piazza is the Centre's dining and entertainment precinct. Here, visitors can take in a movie, go ten pin bowling, relax under a tree reading the newspaper, or share an after work drink and stay on for dinner. The Piazza extends the centre's day to 18 hours and realises its aspiration of a true town centre.

UNRIVALLED RETAIL PRECINCTS

GPT's vision for Charlestown Square was to be the first choice destination for fashion in the Hunter region and through the delivery of 110 new specialty stores, including fashion brands never before found in the Hunter, GPT has realised this vision. The project introduced 40 point of difference retailers.

FRESH FOOD AND CONVENIENCE OFFER

Charlestown Square's Ground Level is home to a fresh food and convenience marketplace featuring national and local operators, along with two full line supermarkets.

SECRET GARDEN

The Centre's Secret Garden is an innovative children's play area designed in collaboration with artists, architects, sculptors and children's specialists. It provides a safe and unique environment for one to six year olds for imaginative play, and is vastly differentiated from standard shopping centre play grounds.

HOW DID YOU DETERMINE THE BUSINESS SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT?

The redevelopment positions the Centre as the most compelling offer in the Hunter Region, superior to competition. It directly addresses key customer drivers in relation to product range particularly in the areas of fashion and fresh food, car parking, access and navigation.

The below figures were developed in December 2006 as part of the final investment proposal approved by The GPT board. Figures forecast at completion included:

SALES
- Centre MAT $585 million, an increase of $234 million.
- Specialty MAT $277 million, an increase of $127 million.
- Centre occupancy 11%, an increase of 0.4%.

MARKET
- Primary trade area market share 20%, an increase of 5.9%.
- Secondary trade area market share 8%, an increase of 3.1%.
- Main trade area market share 11.7%, an increase of 3.8%.

The project successfully secures and maximises the medium to long term performance of the centre.
IF THE CENTRE WAS KEPT OPEN DURING CONSTRUCTION, EXPLAIN WHAT MEASURES WERE TAKEN TO ENSURE SHOPPER SAFETY AND MAIN SHOPPER TRAFFIC, AND WHAT IMPACT THE WORK HAD ON BUSINESS.

Charlestown Square remained a fully operational Centre during the redevelopment. This was made possible due to the level of consistent internal and external communication between all parties involved and affected by the project.

GPT hosted weekly Centre meetings consisting of key representatives from the Centre management team, the development and construction team and the community liaison officer. These meetings were the forum to discuss the various stages of the project and to promptly devise any solutions necessary to ensure the development was delivered with minimal impact to the Centre’s retailers and the community.

Retailers were kept informed throughout the project at monthly retailer briefings where Centre management would discuss upcoming phases of the development and its potential impacts, via monthly newsletters, a specially designed retailer intranet and through retailer inductions.

The Centre was able to retain nearly all retailers during this time despite several retailers needing to be relocated several times throughout the project.

To ensure community engagement throughout the redevelopment over 200 community members attended development tours and 90,000 homes in the trade area received quarterly newsletter updates. Regular development updates were outlined in the local newspaper and over 1,300 people attended on-site development presentations. By the time the development reached completion the community felt a true sense of connection to the Centre.

In addition, GPT broadened its focus beyond the immediate development site to the wider Charlestown community. A 1km radius surrounding the Centre was considered during the redevelopment and significant measures were taken to ensure community comfort during this time.

IN ADDITION TO THE PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS, WHAT ANCILLARY MEASURES WERE TAKEN TO ENHANCE THE CENTRE?

Community engagement was critical to the success of the project and GPT recognised that for the redevelopment to be a success the community needed to inform the overall facilities and design. Therefore extensive community consultation and a detailed place study, informed the design of the new Centre.

To conduct the detailed place study, GPT worked with Advanced Narrative to provide an interpretation of Charlestown through stories. This was a critical element in ensuring that the new Centre accurately reflects its unique community heritage, diversity and future.

The area’s proud history and recurring stories were interwoven through the new Centre’s community spaces.

• The South Piazza’s fountain lights tell the story of Lake Macquarie and its surrounding villages in an embedded light display.
• Crab pot inspired lights in the fresh food market honour the region’s connection to its fishing heritage.
• Timber columns on the ground floor capture important moments in the regions past through interpretive pieces.

Throughout the development GPT further engaged all layers of the community and enhanced their sense of Centre ownership, by taking them on the journey. Over 200 community members attended development tours, approximately 30 students from the local school participated in planting trees to regenerate a creek in close proximity to the Centre, detailed information on the project was shared with the local university and used in engineering courses and a detailed employment program was launched to ensure retailers would have the highest calibre of candidates to interview.

By the time the Centre opened in 2010 it was fully integrated with the aspirations of its community and the community felt a true sense of connection with the Centre.
To launch the new Charlestown Square, a unique and compelling launch campaign had to be developed. To bring the brand to life it was vital that the creative reflect the region through its people and its places, appeal to a wide demographic, provide a point of difference to our competition and reflect the new retail offer.

The theme of the launch was “It’s all in our backyard”.

The theme was chosen to reflect the fact that all community desires are now in their very backyard at Charlestown Square. With over 60 new brands never before seen in the Hunter market, the creative allowed us to promote and celebrate these new brands.

It was also vital that the creative represent the brand personality attributes of being Proud, Cohesive, Energising, Adaptable and Inventive. The creative used local people, instead of models in iconic community locations (Tocal, Warners Bay and Centennial Park). This allowed the Centre to celebrate the local community and its people and further establish the community connection.

The centre was launched in three separate launches:
- Fresh Food and Convenience
- Grand Opening
- South Piazza

Total Budget - $1,041,000

Overall Results
- Over $430,000 in free media coverage generated for the launch of the total Centre
- $540,000 in contra from partners
- Over 1,100 retailer prizes were given away on radio.
  Retailers received over 1,450 mentions on air valued at over $58,000
SUSTAINABLE SITES

Ensuring sustainability during development and into the future, GPT undertook certain initiatives including:

- Stormwater runoff management via detention tanks was implemented to minimise impact on local creeks.
- Voluntary remediation of the local Winding Creek to the extent of providing silt and erosion control at the head of the creek, providing whole of catchment benefit. In addition approximately 30 students from a local school participated in planting trees to regenerate the creek and protect and restore its habitat.
- GPT recognised that the current bus time tables did not satisfy community requirements, so they worked with the state government and the local bus company to better align the bus time tables to reflect people’s movements. This resulted in less cars being driven in and around the Centre.
- To accommodate buses commuting groups to and from the Centre design height allowances within key car parking levels were implemented.
- 18 bike racks to accommodate over 60 bikes were installed at the Centre along with change rooms to promote green travel to and from the Centre.

WATER EFFICIENCY

Initiatives for rainwater collection and re-use, water-efficient fixtures and waterless urinals have all been incorporated. A Blackwater treatment plant has also been provisioned for the future on-site treatment and re-use of waste water. Approximately 90 smart meters have been installed to monitor water usage and provide alerts when abnormal consumption occurs, this avoids water loss through leaking pipes or taps being left on.

ENERGY AND ATMOSPHERE

Adapting a strategy to consider low carbon and renewable electricity a gas-fuel cogeneration plant generates electricity and chilled water (via absorption chillers). The electricity generated can produce up to 60% less Co2 emissions as compared to electricity generated from traditional coal fired powered stations. The implementation of cogeneration was assisted with funding support from the NSW Government’s Climate Change Fund. Charlestown Square has also established Australia’s first solar thermal cooling plant with funding support from the NSW Governments Renewable Energy Development Program.

With the above initiatives successfully implemented at Charlestown Square GPT has pioneered a new approach to energy reduction whereby electricity generated onsite is sold to tenants at a discount to the NSW electricity market rates. This entrepreneurial move delivers environmental savings to the Centre by reducing the entire building’s carbon impact (as opposed to just the base building), while also bringing cost benefits to tenants. Waste heat from the generators is used to create low energy air conditioning from absorption chillers.

In the past 12 months (March 2011 to April 2012) the Charlestown Square cogeneration system has generated 11,417,243 kW hours of electricity or 72%* of the electricity supply for the expanded Charlestown Square (4,363,104 kWh 38% Electricity from Grid).

The cogeneration system is supplied by Natural Gas which has around half the Carbon emissions per 1 kW of electricity produced compared to the grid electricity supplied by coal powered making it a much greener source of electricity supply.

The Charlestown Square cogeneration system also supplies electricity to 179 retail tenancies within the Centre. Majority** of these retailers are offered a 10% discount to the market electricity rate, meaning not only do they receive a saving on the purchase electricity price they also receive a greener supply of electricity.

The on-sell of electricity to retailers represents $1.425M of additional revenue to GPT at a cost of $828,839.00. The NET profit of $596,161.00 (2012)

*Cogeneration supply represents approx. 50% of the Total Centre New and Old Centre
**Excluding 13 retailers that are contestable electricity users

In addition 95 smart meters have been installed to monitor electricity usage and provide alerts when abnormal consumption occurs, avoiding energy loss due to equipment being left on.
SUSTAINABLE DESIGN CONT.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Market leading initiatives were demonstrated throughout the redevelopment, including:

- A partnership with the Victorian Government to develop the Eco footprint calculator. This calculator is now used as a benchmark tool within the industry to understand development impact on ecology. Charlestown Square used this calculator to achieve a 40% ecological footprint reduction on its base building.
- The Centre offers retailer education to employ material and resources that achieve optimal eco footprint outcomes in tenancy fit outs.
- The redevelopment was able to recycle 90% of demolition materials.

INDOOR ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (IEQ)

Charlestown Square’s lighting system has been designed to allow for minimum use and consumption by turning off lights where natural light is available via skylights, the use of LED technologies, and zoning for controlled access and cleaning periods.

The centre uses 11KV high voltage air conditioning chillers to drive increased COP (coefficient of performance), as well as a sophisticated Building Management Control System and energy efficient controls, pumps and motors throughout the centre.

Other initiatives include the use of carbon monoxide monitoring in car parks to control the ventilation system’s motor speed, an innovative car park guidance system to minimise vehicle travel in car parks and cross ventilation louvers throughout the centre for natural ventilation (enabling air conditioning to be turned off).

Mixed Mode ventilation in the food terrace that turns off the air-condition system when the outside temperature is between 18-26°C.

PRESERVATION

Extensive community consultation was undertaken in the early stages of the development, including an in-depth place making and interpretive study. Findings from this study have directly impacted the layout of spaces and materials used to ensure the Centre celebrates the region’s history while also catering for its aspirational future. A 12 person Community Reference Group has been in place for over six years and continues to provide ongoing counsel to the Centre and development team.