



South Taranaki Mayor Ross Dunlop is thrilled the council has purchased a building in Hawera to site its new centre for heritage, arts, library, culture and information.

Building bought for \$6m cultural hub

CATHERINE GROENESTEIN

Hawera has received an early Christmas present – a site has been bought for its new \$6 million cultural hub after a two-year search.

Work on the facility is likely to begin in 12 to 18 months time, at a site on the corner of Regent and High Streets in the middle of town, South Taranaki Mayor, Ross Dunlop said. The facility is a key project in the the South Taranaki District Council's plan to revitalise the town centre.

The two existing buildings – which currently house Gelato Cafe, Dimocks Furniture and Bliss Beauty Retreat – will be demolished and a new complex including a bigger library, meeting

rooms, public toilets, an art gallery and heritage exhibition space, the i-SITE information centre and a cafe, will go up in their place.

Dunlop said the purchase was a highlight of his time as mayor.

"We just had the changing of the TSB Trust boundaries...and this is up there with that. It's very, very positive for South Taranaki and particularly the Hawera CBD." In more good news, paying for the estimated \$6m project would have no impact on rates.

Dunlop said the council was funding part of the project project by way of loans, which would be paid back from annual drawdowns from the council's Long Term Investment Fund. Part of the cost would be sought from outside funding organisations.

The cost of the building is confidential until the final settlement in February, STDC chief executive Craig Stevenson said.

"We believe this was a very good deal as not only was this our preferred location but we were able to get it below valuation. The site is approximately 5000 square metres of prime CBD real estate and is far bigger than we will need for the new facility."

The council would look at options including subdividing the property, redevelopment or joint ventures with private enterprise.

Stevenson said securing the site was a real milestone.

"I think it will give it [the town centre strategy] a real shot in the arm, it will be a significant development right in the town centre."

Having all the facilities under one roof would bring much needed foot traffic, visitors and vibrancy to the town centre, he said.

Stevenson said he was excited about the development. "When the council sets out a master plan like its town centre strategy, there are some things you can control and some you can't. Obviously a big part of the strategy was to encourage more private investment and that's starting to happen. We're developing Campbell Lane and there is a brand new building going up alongside it."

Work is expected to be finished on Campbell Lane in late March 2017, with the Butcher's Lane project starting about the same time. The lanes will link the main street to council carparks.

TDW 22/12/2016