

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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Major student housing project to bring vibrant development to Hobart CBD

The University of Tasmania has unveiled a potentially up to \$70 million plan to build 430 self-contained apartments in Hobart's CBD, under the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS), funded through the Australian Government and with support from the Tasmanian Government.

The project will see the redevelopment of the Melville Street car park into a vibrant and cosmopolitan precinct. In addition to the student accommodation a retail hub is proposed for the site's Elizabeth Street frontage.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen said the NRAS project, with an investment of around \$120 million statewide, would bring significant economic benefits to the State both during and after construction, as well as providing the University with an opportunity to attract new students from across Tasmania and from overseas.

"The University has stated its intention to do more to welcome students from Tasmania, Australia and the world into the life of the University. Living in student accommodation is one part of that great university experience," said Prof Rathjen.

"UTAS is maximising the opportunity with this development by adapting to how students live and study in today's world. This project will attract more than 400 new residents to enjoy life right in the heart of the Hobart CBD.

"Just imagine – to live and shop in an area that's within walking distance of academic buildings, the State Library, shopping, the public transport system and downtown Hobart — that's going to be amazing."

The building design will reflect the layered character of the local streetscape, with retail facilities at street level. The new apartments will be complemented by central common areas, laundry facilities, catering services, academic support services and 24-hour on-site residential support. Public access will be maintained through a landscaped area extending from Brisbane Street to Melville Street.

In addition to the accommodation, a pedestrian-access footbridge will be constructed to link the Domain site with the CBD, providing safe access for students and the public across the Brooker Highway.

Prof Rathjen said a key feature of the NRAS project was to help relieve pressure on the supply of affordable housing.

"Providing a diverse selection of living options is an essential part of developing the quality of student life at UTAS. Socio-economic disadvantage, including the availability of suitable, affordable housing, presents a significant barrier to many students accessing tertiary education," he said.

“The University will reserve apartments for the most disadvantaged students and will assist these students by significantly subsidising their accommodation costs. Up to 10 per cent of all apartments will be fully accessible to students with a disability.”

Prof Rathjen said the Melville St development would provide yet another boost to the local building industry, along with two other University projects nearing completion.

“Stage two of the \$90m Medical Science Two building is scheduled to be substantially complete by the end of January and construction work on the \$45m Institute for Antarctic and Marine Studies building at Salamanca is on schedule to be finished in the third quarter of 2013,” he said.

“These developments, along with the Domain site which was transferred back into University ownership last year and is now undergoing refurbishment and restoration, have the potential of enhancing and contributing to the vibrancy and vitality of the city.”

The investment in NRAS will total some \$120 million, delivering an expected 770 self-contained apartments for student accommodation across the State.

The first stage of the NRAS project is being developed on the Newnham campus in Launceston, where 180 apartments designed by Tasmanian architects Morrison and Breytenbach are due to be constructed by December, to be available for students for the start of the 2014 academic year.

In December, Launceston City Council agreed to transfer a parcel of land to the University, which is earmarked for a second NRAS student accommodation development in the North – a four-storey, \$20 million (approx.) block of 120 apartments.

A \$4 million (approx.) development is also expected in Burnie.

Prof Rathjen said the NRAS project, as with the other recent developments, would reflect the University’s commitment to best-practice sustainability.

“The University’s sustainability credentials were recognised at the annual 2012 Green Gown Awards, which honour excellence in environmental sustainability in the tertiary education sector.

“We received the Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability Award of Excellence. Shortly afterwards MS2 became the first educational building in Tasmania to achieve a five-star Green Star rating for environmental design.”

In December UTAS also announced the \$75 million Academy of Creative Industries and Performing Arts which will be developed adjacent to the Theatre Royal.

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