
Establishing an engagement space at the Molesworth Street premises

Responsible Officer: Group Manager Planning and Delivery (Andrew Logan)

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Agree to not sub-let the former NRMA space on Level 2 Molesworth Street for the remainder of Rous' approximate 18 months on the site.
2. Approve the use of a portion of the budget allocation for the former RCEIC for 2022/23 to establishing this new space in the shopfront area on Level 2 as an engagement space across Rous's respective service delivery areas.

Background

The *Rous Cultural Environmental and Information Centre* (RCEIC) that was established in the Lismore Visitor Information Centre sought to provide a focal point for Rous engagement across all service delivery areas including engagement with First Nations communities. It was also intended to be a starting point for Rous in this education/engagement field, for a defined period of time, to gain experience in operating an education and engagement space of this nature and to allow us to build education and engagement activities over time.

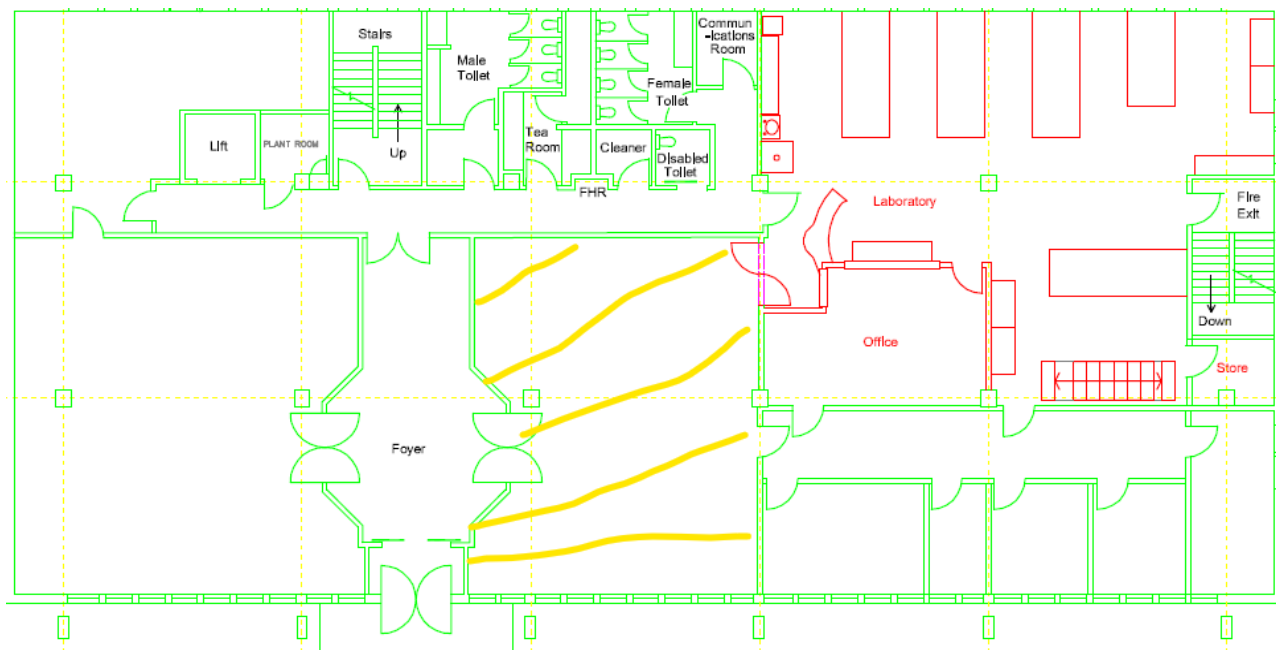
Clearly the loss of the centre through the devastating floods of February and March 2022 has impacted on the planned rollout of community education/engagement activities and there is now work to be undertaken to reconsider or reframe these engagement strategies.

An opportunity has been identified at the Molesworth Street premises to recreate some of the engagement opportunities that the RCEIC provided – in a low risk and low cost way. The shopfront area on Level 2 (that was previously sublet to NRMA) provides an easily accessible and welcoming space that is suitable for creating an engagement area for stakeholders and the broader community.

The plan is to establish a 'passive' information and resource centre that is open for stakeholders and the general public to access resources. The area will feature the following:

- display panels (recovered from the RCEIC but after cleaning are still in reasonable condition and appropriate for use);
- artwork of local Widjabul artist Sheldon Harrington Jnr on the walls (recovered from the RCEIC but after cleaning is still in reasonable condition and appropriate for use);
- tables and chairs in the centre of the room for use by the broader community and to allow hosting of organised and informal meetings;
- printed collateral would be displayed and made available on shelving;
- a television screen to be installed to showcase the video content that was previously 'curated' for the RCEIC.

The area that is proposed to be used is the front open area of the former NRMA space on Level 2.



This area is very accessible and welcoming and is a good workable space for these purposes.

By providing 'passive' content, the security risks are low, as it shall be a user guided experience and there is no need for the area to be staffed at all times. The space would be open whenever the building is open. However, it is also proposed that a number of hot desks with docking stations be setup so that staff could also work from this space when convenient. Laptops would be removed whenever the area was not staffed.

In addition to the signage panels that profile the respective Rous service delivery areas, additional opportunities include the ability to:

- showcase the priority weed biosecurity issues in this post-flood context
- distribute weed biosecurity capacity building guidance material
- access to key landholder guides for waterways
- make available information for the Future Water Project
- showcase video content on a screen.

Of key significance is the low-key nature of the entry to this space. By providing the opportunity for First Nations community members (and the broader community) to 'drop in' in an informal setting, reduces the barriers to visitation and can build trust. Development of this space in this way shall provide the Reconciliation Liaison Officer with an informal but comfortable space within which to build relationships with First Nations stakeholders and conduct events/activities.

Governance

• Integrated Planning and Reporting

This space will assist Rous to deliver on a series of objectives in relation to the Key Theme No. 2 - *External relationships*. It will do this by providing enhanced opportunities to build community understanding of the breadth of functions and results that Council delivers, and by providing a further avenue to maintaining strong relationships with others to promote positive business, environment and community outcomes. It will also provide a suitable space to positively engage with our First Nations communities in delivering against the objectives of our Reconciliation Action Plan.

Finance

It is not planned to sub-let the Rous leased areas on Level 2 for the approximate 18-month period that Rous will remain at the Molesworth Street premises. At commercial rates, this is likely to equate to forgone lease fees of approximately \$40,000 over this period.

Estimated costs of establishing this temporary space are in the order of \$10,000. There would be some costs for carpet, television screen, workstations and furniture, however this shall be done in a low cost way. This can be accommodated from the funds originally allocated to operation of the RCEIC.

Legal

There are no legal issues associated with operation of this space.

Consultation

This proposal has been prepared and considered by staff across the organisation including the Leadership Team. Rous will inform our constituent councils of the opening of this area should they see opportunities for engagement across our respective for the flood mitigation service delivery areas.

Conclusion

This Molesworth Street office Level 2 space provides us with an opportunity to provide an informal education and engagement space at low risk and at low cost. As it would only be for the remaining time that Rous is a tenant in this building, it will provide us with this opportunity to trial different approaches for a limited period. Importantly, it would allow our approach to First Nations engagement to grow 'organically' with a dedicated space as well as provide an additional meeting room when required. The space could be established and operational quickly and for a small investment. It is consistent with all of the objectives that were endorsed by Council for the RCEIC. Operation of this space is a temporary arrangement only as our future focus for engagement will be at Gallans Road.