

A 'Fantastic' New Wallsend Library After 60 Years!

Wallsend District Library is the first new library to be built in Newcastle in over 30 years. It is an exciting, award-winning building,¹ which has changed the way that the community views and uses library services. It is a spacious, modern design that demonstrates how ecologically sustainable design can be included in a large public facility.

In May 2007, after its first year of operation, Wallsend District Library recorded 622,000 loans and 275,000 visits and became the busiest branch in Newcastle's library network. This level of usage is in vivid contrast to the old Wallsend Library's annual activity of 222,000 loans and 108,000 visits.

The new development (1736m²) replaces the oldest Newcastle library (136m²), originally built in 1948, and totally inadequate in size to serve the growing surrounding population estimated to reach 42,000 in by 2013. It is located immediately opposite a shopping centre and adjacent to a childcare centre and major bus stop.

The library now houses more than 60,000 borrowing items; eighteen public access computers; a children's area and youth space; group study spaces and quiet reading nooks; a multifunction and heritage room; and self-service check-outs.

Designed by Brewster Hjorth Architects, the building consists of two curved pavilions, oriented in a north-south direction, following the curve of the street, and has an open, light-filled form, with extensive glass frontage. An internal 'main street' is a focus in the centre of the building and houses the customer service area and casual reading areas, which are set amongst internal planting.

The library has been included in Newcastle City Council's ECOSTAR™ program and features AAA taps & dual flush; smart lighting; smart heating and cooling with a displacement air handling system; smart hot water; and water harvest and reuse.

Three public artworks works were commissioned for the library and they include parquetry reading tables, a children's suspended sculpture and ten artboxes. A community artist-in-residence program has produced a fourth art work for the building.

The response to the new library has far exceeded expectations. The community has looked forward to this new facility for many years and has embraced it wholeheartedly and with enormous pride. An economic impact study has confirmed the community's satisfaction with the new library, with a mean satisfaction rating of a near-perfect 4.8 out of 5.

One library customer sums up the experience:

Wallsend Library is fantastic! My kids have a new found interest in reading, well DVDs, CDs & computers ... they also love the chocolate machine. What is this world coming to ... eating in the library? Jessica is meeting me at the library today, she wants me to help her study in one of those cute little rooms ... Jayden has made me promise to take him to see Wacky Wombat on Saturday morning.

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1. Wallsend District Library won three awards in the Landcom 2006 Lower Hunter Civic Design Awards.

