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Our new Visitor Centre is opening soon... and you're invited to come check it out!

Consolidating visitor information services and our renowned Whale Centre

In 2020, the City of Victor Harbor made the decision to enhance the way it delivers visitor services by consolidating the Visitor Centre (VC) and SA Whale Centre. This change will see both the VC and SA Whale Centre operating from one location – the site of the historic Railway Goods Shed on Railway Terrace.

As part of this consolidation, significant development has been required on the existing Railway Goods Shed on Railway Terrace to ensure it can offer a modern experience that caters to the needs of Victor Harbor's 1.2 million annual visitors. These renovations also ensure the building meets relevant safety and accessibility standards.

The building will now be predominantly referred to as the 'Victor Harbor Visitor Centre' or 'VC', but it also encompasses the interpretive centre and whale sighting information services of the SA Whale Centre.

A modern and inviting facility for visitors

The VC is scheduled to open to the public from 12pm on Wednesday 14 December 2022, ahead of Victor Harbor's busy summer period. It will open daily from 10am to 4pm, seven days a week (excluding Christmas Day).

City of Victor Harbor Mayor, Dr Moira Jenkins, said the Railway Goods Shed renovation complements other recent projects to enhance Victor Harbor's town centre. This includes the award-winning Railway Plaza redevelopment and the streetscape improvements as part of the Mainstreet Stage 4 Upgrade.

"The Railway Goods Shed has significant historical value. Now the restoration is complete, it presents a warm and welcoming atmosphere for visitors," said Mayor Jenkins.

"But the redeveloped building isn't just for visitors – it's also a hub for locals to access resources and learn more about our diverse marine life. I encourage all Fleurieu Peninsula locals to drop by and check out everything that's on offer."

"Our passionate volunteers and staff are ready to welcome you into the new space."

No shortage of challenges, but a fantastic outcome achieved

A number of works were completed as part of the Railway Goods Shed renovations, including the installation of a new lift that services all three floors, upgrades to the toilets, and inclusion of new building fire safety equipment.

The cherished heritage features of the building have been retained and restored, from the smoke-tainted walls that serve as a reminder of the steam trains that once occupied the building, to the timber beams and entrance archways.

The much-loved floor mural, featuring a Southern Right Whale and baby calf, has also been repainted by its original artist, Barbary O'Brien.

City of Victor Harbor Acting Chief Executive Officer, Karen Rokicinski, acknowledged the hard work that has gone into the redevelopment of the Railway Goods Shed.

"I want to thank everyone who has been involved in the renovations to our Railway Goods Shed," said Ms Rokicinski.

"Consolidating the VC and SA Whale Centre will achieve cost savings, eliminate duplication of services and allow us to increase our focus on digital marketing."

"It ties into the work that has been undertaken in collaboration with Business Victor Harbor on a new brand and related tourism website, which seeks to proactively promote our City as a place to visit, live and invest, and shift outdated perceptions of Victor Harbor."

"A number of unforeseen complexities have meant the renovations have taken longer than initially anticipated, but Council staff, contractors and volunteers never wavered from their commitment to restore this wonderful asset for our community."

Among the challenges presented by this historic building were the discovery of termite damage and a previously unknown perched water table below the building that required significant re-engineering to accommodate a new lift shaft. Other difficulties have included supply of building materials, sourcing of trades people and Covid-19 related absences across all stakeholders.

The re-purposing of the Railway Goods Shed building has been supported by a substantial investment from the Council as well as grant funding from the Federal Government.

Celebrating the rich history of the Railway Goods Shed

The Railway Goods Shed was built in 1864 during early European settlement. It was used for storing goods and produce that were transported along the Murray River and across Australia's first public railway, pending shipment to the world via the port of Victor Harbor.

While the building has a strong connection to our region's European history, the VC team has also been working closely with First Nations leaders to ensure stories of our Ramindjeri and Ngarrindjeri peoples are shared within the building.

The volunteer and staff uniforms have been designed with artwork by local First Nations artist, Amanda Westley. It is also expected that First Nations history and storytelling will be incorporated into educational programs that will soon be delivered in the space.