

NORTHLAND CRICKET SPIRE PAVILION WHANGAREI

By Graham Hepburn



When Northland Cricket relocated to a new home ground five years ago, it paid tribute to the game's past with the design of its headquarters but had a firm eye on the future.

The move to a new ground was spurred by a review of the district plan by Whangarei District Council that identified Cobham Oval as prime land for commercial development. The council asked the Northland Cricket Association (NCA) if they would consider relocating to reclaimed land adjacent to Okara Park, the home of Northland rugby.

NCA chief executive officer Gary Bell says they seized the opportunity to create a first class ground from scratch at the new Cobham Oval and wanted to build an "iconic" headquarters. "We wanted something special that symbolises cricket," says Bell of the ground's pavilion, which is modelled

on The Pavilion at Lord's cricket ground, the spiritual home of the game, in London.

"It would have been easier to build something that didn't have as much character; we would have got more bang for our buck," says Bell. "But now we've got an iconic building in Northland and no one else around has got anything to rival it." The building also reflects the long history of the NCA, which has been administering cricket from Warkworth to Kaitiaki since 1927.

Just like The Pavilion at Lord's, the Cobham Oval building has two towers with a "Long Room" in the middle. The scorers sit in the righthand tower with a view of the scoreboard, while commentators sit in the lefthand tower which looks almost straight down the wicket.

"We've had former international players John Wright and Glenn Turner here and they are just blown away by the Spire Pavilion," says Bell. "You walk out into the middle and look back at the pavilion and it is just outstanding."



Below : As well as catering to the club the facilities provide the residents of the Whangarei area with a venue for many social events, weddings and conferences.



The classical lines of the building are complemented by the HiRib500 profile of the COLORSTEEL® Endura, roof which also tops off the towers. The dark roof also provides a nice contrast to the building's mostly cream-coloured exterior.

While the design might look effortless and elegant, it presented considerable challenges for Ian Butt of HB Architects, based in Whangarei. Because the concrete building is sited on reclaimed land that had been occupied by a sawmill and a dump, it is lifted to provide an airspace to allow ventilation for escaping methane gases. The foundations are 25m deep piers and the cricket pitch was excavated to a depth of 6m and filled with clay,

The Spire Pavilion has two reception areas, a commercial kitchen, players facilities and lounge, incorporating a viewing deck, media, commentators and umpire areas.

The ground floor is occupied by changing rooms, a player's dining room, kitchen and offices for Northland Cricket Association. The first floor lounge seats up to 150 people and can cater for conferences, weddings, community groups and trade shows. Cobham Oval also has a modern indoor training and coaching facility in the Mark Cromie Holden Indoor Center adjacent to the pavilion, and high quality outdoor coaching and practice facilities.

While NCA is rightly proud of the Spire Pavilion, the signature building is just part of the plan to host internationals in the future – and the NCA has targeted the 2015 Cricket World Cup as well as hoping to one day bring test cricket to the ground. With New Zealand sharing hosting rights in 2015, Bell says the NCA is hopeful of attracting some of the international teams to Cobham Oval to practice or play "friendlies" in

the build-up to the cup. The ultimate prize would be a pool game in the cup itself.

But to host international teams that means having the ground certified by the ICC and to do that Cobham Oval will need to provide larger changing rooms to cater for the bigger international squads.

Bell says the new changing rooms will be built adjacent to the Spire Pavilion and take the form of something similar in style to a large Queensland homestead with wide verandahs. "It will have a rolled verandah out the front and look more like a Queenslander," says Bell. "The players will enjoy and appreciate the environment we are creating"

The NCA is also making progress on increasing the ground's capacity by forming embankments and providing an area for corporate tents.

Cobham Oval hosted 21 days of first class cricket in the past season but that is just the beginning for a ground that is being geared to create the perfect atmosphere for international cricket.

Ian Butt, HB Architects

Ian has worked as an architectural designer in Whangarei for 24 years, employing up to seven staff. His experience takes in design, documentation and project observation of residential, multi-unit housing, commercial and industrial projects. He is a director of HB Architecture, which was formed in 2007 and aims to produce elegant architecture using proven building techniques and cutting edge technology. HB Architecture tries to combine function and aesthetic value to produce enduring architecture that is in harmony with nature and ecological principles.

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