TWELVE APOSTLES VISITOR PRECINCT

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# GRIMSHAW AND ASPECT STUDIOS RESHAPE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST SIGNIFICANT COASTAL LANDSCAPES

STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 14 OCTOBER 2026

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At the Twelve Apostles, Grimshaw and ASPECT Studios and the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Land Corporation have conceived the new visitor precinct as a landscape from which the architecture emerges. The project brings together the new Keerray Woorroong Visitor Centre, Welcome Garden, extensive revegetation, landscaped parking and a reorganisation of pedestrian and vehicle movement to create a new arrival and visitor experience for one of Australia's most visited natural landmarks.

Led by Grimshaw, the multidisciplinary design has been co-designed with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and with landscape architects ASPECT Studios. Rather than treating the Visitor Experience Centre as an isolated building, the project uses landscape, architecture and movement through the site to establish a sequence from arrival to Country and, ultimately, the coast.

The transformation begins well before the building. A new landscaped car park and access roads separate buses and private vehicles, while pedestrian routes draw visitors from the parking areas into the Welcome Garden and towards the Visitor Experience Centre. From here, visitors continue towards the existing coastal zone and the Twelve Apostles. The result replaces an arrival previously dominated by vehicles with a more legible progression through landscape.

This sequence is central to a broader ambition for the precinct: to move beyond simply processing large numbers of visitors and create a slower and more connected experience of Country. The project has been developed through a Traditional Owner-led co-design process with Eastern Maar, whose knowledge, culture and understanding of Country as an interconnected system form the bio-cultural foundation of the project.

CONTINUES

The Welcome Garden plays an important role in this transition. Coastal scrub, grassland and woodland landscapes converge around the Visitor Experience Centre, with pathways allowing visitors to move through these different ecologies. Bush tucker planting, habitat and environmental interpretation extend the experience of Country into the landscape itself.

The same landscape logic generates the architecture. Grimshaw describes the Visitor Experience Centre as a "land form" building: an architecture that emerges from, and remains secondary to, the surrounding landscape. The convergence of woodland, grassland and coastal scrub informs the building's siting, massing, and the spaces around it, blurring the conventional boundary between built form and landscape.

The Visitor Experience Centre is organised as two connected forms embedded within the landscape. The Coastal Building contains the principal public-facing spaces and orientation area, while the Hinterland Building accommodates the café together with retail space , and servicing functions. In the main orientation space visitors are given opportunities to understand the natural and cultural landscape and the responsibilities associated with moving through Country, before proceeding into the coastal zone.

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The building's position and orientation respond closely to the existing site. Its location hugging the crest of the paddock captures views towards the coast, while its siting also responds to historic ecological vegetation classes, topography, universal access, solar and wind conditions, areas of cultural significance and the presence of rare River Swamp Wallaby Grass. Views from the heritage-listed Great Ocean Road and culturally significant visual connections identified by Eastern Maar have also informed the extent and placement of built form.

This relationship between architecture and landscape continues onto the roof. The publicly accessible Great Ocean Lookout transforms the roof of the Visitor Experience Centre into another part of the visitor journey, creating an elevated landscape from which visitors can look across the precinct towards the coast. The lookout forms part of an all-abilities route incorporating gathering areas, places to pause and opportunities for interpretation, before visitors continue towards the Twelve Apostles and surrounding coastal landscape.

Landscape regeneration extends across the wider precinct. New coastal scrub, grassland and woodland planting is intended to progressively offset the hardscape introduced by the redevelopment while restoring habitat and creating opportunities for environmental education and Eastern Maar bush-tucker planting. Rather than landscape operating as a setting for the architecture, revegetation is conceived as an evolving part of the project, gradually reshaping the precinct over time.

Together, the Visitor Experience Centre, Welcome Garden, new arrival landscape, parking and pedestrian network recast the Twelve Apostles precinct as a connected journey through landscape. The architecture is one element within that larger experience: emerging from Country, framing the visitor's arrival and establishing a new threshold between the Great Ocean Road and the extraordinary coastal landscape beyond.

CONTINUES

Andrew Perez, Melbourne Managing Partner, Grimshaw, said, "Grimshaw has been privileged to work collaboratively with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and our landscape architecture partners, ASPECT Studios, on a project that begins with a profound respect for this extraordinary place.

The Twelve Apostles is a truly unique landscape in Australia and arguably anywhere in the world, where the power of the natural environment, the experience of Country and the enduring culture of Eastern Maar come together. It is a rare opportunity to create a place that allows visitors to experience this landscape in a deeper and more meaningful way.

More than simply providing a new destination from which to experience the Twelve Apostles, the project invites visitors to pause, linger and explore, creating a meaningful connection to this extraordinary landscape and the culture and history that have shaped it."



"The Twelve Apostles Visitor Precinct presented an opportunity to create a more considered relationship between visitors, Country and this extraordinary coastal landscape. Working closely with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, the design brings together the Welcome Garden, arrival landscape, trails and pedestrian network to create a connected journey through the precinct and creating opportunities for visitors to engage with Country, culture and place. A regenerative design approach has been embedded throughout the project, with a focus on reducing harm to Country, restoring the existing farmland through indigenous revegetation and incorporating Eastern Maar knowledge and plant use into the visitor experience.", said Matthew Mackay, Studio Director, ASPECT Studios.

ENDS.

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PROJECT PHOTOGRAPHY CONTACT SHEETS FOLLOW

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MEDIA ASSETS
TWELVE APOSTLES PRECINCT REDEVELOPMENT

260901 12 Apostles 0913

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260901 12 Apostles 0257

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260901 12 Apostles 2276+2779

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260901 12 Apostles 1914-1922

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APPENDIX 1

# ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

## PROJECT SCOPE AND DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Project: The Twelve Apostles Visitor Precinct, Keerray Woorroong Country, Victoria, Australia

Client: Development Victoria

Main delivery partner: Development Victoria

Completion: 2026

## PROJECT CHRONOLOGY AND GRIMSHAW'S ROLE

| Period | Role and contribution |
|---|---|
| 2019-2022 | Masterplan development and precinct planning for the Twelve Apostles Precinct Redevelopment |
| 2022-2026 | Lead Consultant for the Visitor Experience Centre and Coastal Lookouts, providing full architectural services and multidisciplinary coordination. |
| 2024-2026 | Detailed Design through construction delivery, including Visitor Experience Centre, landscape, visitor infrastructure. |

## PROJECT SCOPE AND DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

6 Grimshaw has been involved with the Twelve Apostles Precinct Redevelopment since the commencement of the Masterplan in 2019 and was appointed Lead Consultant for the Visitor Experience Centre and Coastal Lookouts in 2022. Grimshaw's commission encompasses full architectural services from concept design through construction and coordination of the multidisciplinary consultant team.

The project extends considerably beyond the approximately 3,300m$^2$ new Keerray Woorroong Visitor Centre. Its scope encompasses new roads and expanded parking for private cars, extensive landscape and revegetation works, new pedestrian paths and trails, and the new Great Ocean Road Lookout.

The wider precinct has therefore been conceived as an integrated piece of visitor infrastructure rather than as a building and a series of separate external works. The design addresses the complete visitor journey—from vehicle arrival and movement through the landscape to cultural orientation, the Visitor Experience Centre and subsequent dispersal towards the Twelve Apostles and surrounding coastal attractions.

The Visitor Experience Centre itself hugs the crest of the existing paddock. Its siting responds simultaneously to historic Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), topography and coastal views; universal-access travel distances; solar and prevailing wind conditions; culturally sensitive areas; and the presence of rare River Swamp Wallaby Grass The placement of built form also protects views from the heritage-listed Great Ocean Road and a culturally significant visual connection identified by Eastern Maar between a high point on the site and Gibson Steps.

## EASTERN MAAR CO-DESIGN AND COUNTRY

The project has been developed through an ongoing co-design relationship with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC), beginning during the Masterplan and continuing throughout the subsequent architectural design process. The project team followed Australian Indigenous Design Charter protocols, with nine Eastern Maar design workshops recorded by the Detailed Design stage in September 2024.

Eastern Maar knowledge and understanding of Country as an interconnected system provides the bio-cultural foundation for the project. This is expressed through the concept of the Layers of Country—including Wind Country, Water Country, Sky Country, On Country and Below Country—and the overarching principle of Do No Harm.

The co-design process established a series of principles with direct implications for the design: built form should respect and minimise disturbance to Country; Caring for Country should extend across Sea, Sky, Land and Below Country; natural materials should be prioritised and sourced from Maar Country and the surrounding region where possible; spaces should provide opportunities for gathering, pause and

reflection; and revegetation and land management should draw upon Eastern Maar cultural land-management knowledge. A further principle establishes that disturbance to Maar Country should be remediated on Maar Country.

These principles have influenced specific architectural and landscape decisions rather than operating solely as an interpretive layer. Eastern Maar contributed to the development of the landform-building approach and the configuration of the central skylight, which establishes a connection with Sky Country. Co-design also informed the selection and arrangement of Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC) for revegetation; material and colour selections, including rammed earth and rendered internal walls; and the incorporation of EVC references into flooring patterns and exposed-aggregate material selections.

## LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY AND THE WELCOME GARDEN

The landscape strategy developed by Grimshaw and ASPECT Studios is based on the convergence of three principal landscape typologies—coastal scrub, grassland and woodland—at the Visitor Experience Centre. Designed as a "pedagogical landscape," the intersection between these vegetation types and the precinct's circulation creates a changing landscape experience extending from arrival, through the architecture and towards the coast.

The landscape is therefore both ecological infrastructure and a means of understanding the site. Convergence and fluctuation between landscape typologies help generate architectural form and the spaces between topography, vegetation and built form. This same strategy underpins the concept of the Visitor Experience Centre as a landform rather than an autonomous object within the landscape.

The Welcome Garden provides the first concentrated expression of this approach. Its design references pre-1750s Ecological Vegetation Classes, with Coastal Scrub, Woodland and Grassland landscapes extending towards and through the Visitor Experience Centre. Primary paths draw visitors towards the building while transverse exploration paths move across the EVC areas, revealing different scales of ecological information—from the broader ecosystem and vegetation layers to individual species.

The Welcome Garden incorporates discovery trails, a Bush Tucker Garden, gathering and event spaces and opportunities for cultural and environmental interpretation. Vegetation, material selection and landscape management are informed by identified bio-zones, providing a means of communicating Eastern Maar approaches to ecosystem-centred Caring for Country.

Over time, revegetation is intended to progressively offset hardscape infrastructure introduced by the redevelopment. Coastal scrub, grassland and woodland planting provides habitat as well as opportunities for environmental education and the interpretation of Eastern Maar bush-tucker species and uses.

## ARCHITECTURE AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE

7 The architectural concept for the Visitor Experience Centre (VEC) is derived directly from the wider landscape strategy. Grimshaw describes the VEC as a "landform" building, emerging from and remaining secondary to the surrounding landscape. Woodland, grassland and coastal scrub ecologies converge around the architecture, while fluctuations between landscape types generate the form of the building and the external spaces around it.

Rather than a single building volume, the VEC is conceived as two connected forms embedded within the landscape and reflecting the Coastal, Grassland and Woodland Ecological Vegetation Classes. The Coastal Building and principal Orientation Space accommodate the primary public-facing functions; the Hinterland Building accommodates the café together with retail space, load in and other back-of-house functions.

Functional planning has been developed around pedestrian movement and seasonal operating conditions, recognising the significant variation in visitation experienced at the Twelve Apostles. The building forms one stage in a larger visitor sequence rather than operating as the final destination.

Visitors move from the arrival landscape into the Welcome Garden and through the Visitor Experience Centre before proceeding into the coastal zone. Within the VEC, orientation and interpretive spaces provide opportunities to understand the cultural and environmental significance of the site and the responsibility to tread lightly on Country before encountering the Twelve Apostles landscape itself.

This sequence continues across the wider precinct through the Bush Tucker Garden, Discovery Trails, Gathering Space, Great Ocean Lookout and coastal walking trails. Interior interpretation is conceived around visual, animated material exploring broader narratives of place, while exterior interpretation is more tactile and immediate, embedding stories within landscape, paths, seating and other elements encountered along the journey.

## GREAT OCEAN LOOKOUT AND INTERPRETATION

The Great Ocean Lookout extends the visitor journey onto the roof of the Visitor Experience Centre, allowing the architecture to return to landscape. Landscaped paths rise towards an observation deck, with interpretive nodes and places to pause incorporated along the route. The lookout provides an elevated perspective across the regenerated precinct and towards the coast while forming part of an all-abilities circulation route.

Interpretation associated with the ascent to the lookout has been developed around the migration and life cycle of the Short-finned Eel, a story of significance to Eastern Maar. The winding path provides the framework for communicating successive stages of the eel's migration, with proposed sandblasted treatments to the concrete differentiating the freshwater and saltwater stages of its life cycle.

The adjoining external Gathering Space draws upon the Layers of Country and the limestone geology characteristic of the region. Tiered stone seating, landscape and interpretive elements create a place for gathering, storytelling, orientation and pause before visitors continue into the coastal landscape.

Interpretation throughout the precinct is conceived as a distributed experience rather than being confined to the Visitor Experience Centre. Eastern Maar stories, ecological knowledge, geology, habitat and fauna are encountered through gardens, trails, architecture, interpretive installations and wayfinding, allowing cultural and environmental understanding to accumulate as visitors move through the site.

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGENERATIVE DESIGN

Regenerative design objectives have informed the project from its early design stages, responding to the ecological, geological and cultural sensitivity of the site. A Regenerative Tourism Framework developed during concept design links the physical design of the precinct to a model of visitation intended to prioritise the quality of the visitor experience over simply maximising visitor numbers.

The Visitor Experience Centre has been designed to meet Passive House performance and certification standards, incorporating a high-performance building envelope, airtight construction, enhanced indoor air quality and acoustic performance. Other precinct wide measures include onsite water treatment, rainwater harvesting, reduced energy demand supported by photovoltaic generation, biophilic design and a circular-economy approach to materials.

Environmental investigations have also directly changed the physical design. Ecological surveys identified rare grass species, resulting in reconfiguration of parts of the building and pathway network to reduce disturbance.

Geophysical and geotechnical investigations as well as findings from the Cultural Heritage Management Plan were integrated into the design to minimise impacts on culturally and environmentally sensitive areas. Stormwater is managed on site through a dry detention basin that captures runoff, filters and then slowly releases it after a rainfall event, reducing downstream environmental impacts.

Revegetation completes this regenerative strategy at precinct scale. Rather than attempting to preserve the site as a static condition, the project establishes a landscape intended to develop over time, slowly restoring and strengthening coastal scrub, grassland and woodland ecologies.

## ARRIVAL, ACCESS AND VISITATION



The redesign of arrival is one of the project's most significant precinct-scale interventions. New landscaped parking, access roads and separate bus and private-vehicle movements are combined with pedestrian trails that direct visitors intuitively from their vehicles into the Welcome Garden and Visitor Experience Centre before they enter the coastal zone.

This arrangement responds to both the scale of visitation at the Twelve Apostles and the environmental sensitivity of the site. The precinct design coordinates parking, drop-off, pedestrian movement and visitor dispersal while maintaining universal access between the car park, and Visitor Experience Centre and the Great Ocean Road Lookout.

The precinct was developed around a demand managed visitation intended to create a slower more connected visitor experience.

The physical design and visitation strategy therefore operate together: visitor management regulates demand, while the architecture and landscape organise how visitors experience the precinct once they arrive.

From the Visitor Experience Centre, pedestrian connections provide access towards the existing Twelve Apostles Lookout, Saddle Lookout, The Steps and Great Ocean Walk, while the broader precinct strategy allows for coordinated dispersal to surrounding attractions. The Great Ocean Lookout on the VEC roof provides an additional point of orientation within this network.

APPENDIX 2

# PROJECT TEAM

| Role | Organisation/person |
|---|---|
| Architecture | Grimshaw |
| Design Lead | Harriet Oswald, Project and Design Lead |
| Lead Designer | Eduard Ross, Principal |
| Partner in Charge | Andrew Perez, Managing Partner Melbourne |
| Landscape Architect, Traditional Owner Engagement Lead, Signage & Wayfinding (External) | ASPECT Studios |
| Lead Designers | Matthew Mackay, Studio Director<br>Nirvana Kadric |
| Co-design Partners, Indigenous Culture and Heritage Consultants | Eastern Maar Aboriginal Land Corporation |
| Builder | Kane Constructions |
| Client | Development Victoria |

| Consultants | Organisation/person |
|---|---|
| • Structural, Fire and Traffic Engineering<br>• Lighting Design<br>• Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) & Passive House Consultant<br>• Ecologist, Native Wildlife And Vegetation Consultant<br>• Specialist Lighting Consultant<br>• ICT, Audio-visual & Security Consultants<br>• Structural Engineer<br>• Services Engineers (including All Sub-disciplines; Mechanical, Electrical, Hydraulics)<br>• Civil Engineer<br>• Water Management / Hydrologist / Flood Management, Infrastructure, Traffic Engineer - Sustainable Transport & Traffic Management<br>• Fire Risk Assessment / Fire Safety Engineer<br>• Acoustic Engineer<br>• Waste & logistics<br>• Geotechnical Engineering | WSP |
| Traditional Owner Engagement Lead<br>Landscape Interpretation<br>Landscape Signage & Wayfinding | ASPECT Studios |
| Interpretation & Experiential Design & Signage & Wayfinding | Arterial Design |
| Cultural Heritage Assessment & CHMP | Biosis |
| Heritage Consultant | Extent |

| | |
|---|---|
| Bush Fire Consultant | Terramatrix |
| Building Code and Access Consultants | Du Chateau Chun |
| Town Planning | Urbis |
| Visitation and Financial Modelling | Value Advisory Partners |
| Tourism Consultant | TRC Tourism |
| Food and Beveridge Strategy & Kitchen Consultant | Future Food |
| Land Survey | Land Dimensions |
| Pedestrian Planning | Movissian |
| Passive House Certifer | Detail Green |
| Wind Consultant | Mel Consultants |

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