After more than 30 years of quarrying activities on the Cumberland Plains at the foot of the Blue Mountains, the Penrith Lakes Development Corporation Ltd (PLDC) is now moving into the next stage of this massive project, which will eventually see the end of quarrying and the completion of a new system of lakes and parks.

The Penrith Lakes Scheme has been an integral part of the Penrith Valley landscape for many years and quarrying has been conducted here for hundreds of years.

In 1837 the sandstone used to build St Stephens Church in High Street, Penrith was extracted from the Howells sandstone quarry at the northern end of Penrith Lakes. Sandstone from this quarry also built the foundations of the public schools at Agnes Banks, Castlereagh, Cranebrook, Penrith and Emu Plains.

The idea to turn Penrith’s sand and gravel quarries into lakes at the end of their life was first proposed in 1968.

The companies then working in the area combined their land holdings and quarrying operations in a joint venture to coordinate extraction and rehabilitation of the quarry sites. They became the Penrith Lakes Development Corporation (PLDC) in 1980.

A feasibility study by PLDC showed that it was technically, environmentally and economically viable to create a series of lakes in the old quarries as part of a rehabilitation solution. PLDC began working with the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and the Penrith City Council in 1986 to fulfill the vision.

The NSW Government facilitated implementation of the Penrith Lakes Scheme by passing the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan No.11 under the Environment Planning and Assessment Act. The plan sets out the framework for design, ongoing quarrying and future uses of the scheme. A Deed of Agreement between the Government and PLDC defines standards for landform construction, water management, erosion control, landscaping, and dust and noise control, among other things.

In 1986 the NSW Government unveiled the visionary scheme, which would see a new aquatic playground developed at Penrith for the people of Western Sydney. The new lake system would be formed as the result of quarrying operations to extract sand and gravel for Sydney’s building industry from the Cumberland floodplains, on the banks of the Nepean River at Penrith.

In 2005 the Penrith Lakes Scheme was included in the NSW Government’s Major Projects State Environmental Planning Policy to continue to facilitate the implementation of the project.

To date, more than 160 million tonnes of commercial sand and gravel from the Penrith Lakes site have provided around 50% of Sydney’s requirements. To put this into perspective, this amount of rock will be enough to fill Melbourne Cricket Ground (the largest stadium in Australia) completely – from the playing field to the top of the stands – 52 times.

As the first stage of the Lakes Scheme, the 196 ha Sydney International Regatta Centre (SIRC) was successfully completed in 1995. SIRC is one of the best rowing and sprint kayak courses in the world and won international acclaim during the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. It is now a popular sporting, corporate and social venue and receives an average of 50,000 visitors a month.
Quarrying on the site is drawing to a close after nearly a century and the Scheme is moving quickly into the exciting new phase of recreational open space and urban development with a recent submission to the NSW Government for re-zoning of the urban precinct within the Scheme.

The re-zoning at the Penrith Lakes will produce at least 5,000 residential lots and associated infrastructure and facilities, creating huge investment in the local economy, hundreds of construction jobs and the chance for thousands of Sydney home buyers to secure new home sites surrounded by unsurpassed aquatic, wildlife and outdoor recreational amenities.