Opening the new Gillen Club last night Chief Minister, Clare Martin, said that it stands as a fine example of Alice Springs’ community spirit.

“The new Club is a worthy successor to the West’s Sporting Club and will play a prominent role in Alice Springs,” she said.

“This development helped create jobs and will contribute so much to our great NT lifestyle.”

Ms Martin said that 12 months ago Dr Peter Toyne, as Minister for Justice, approved the conversion of the title for the land allowing the West’s Sporting Club facilities to be sold at market price to a local business consortium headed by Viv Oldfield.

“Westies had been struggling financially and the committee of volunteers, who were trying to get the club on a sound footing, decided that involving the private sector would be a good move as occurred in Darwin at the Casuarina Club,” she said.

“The old club was on Government land so we approved its release, allowing for the new up-market, licensed multi-million dollar Gillen Club development and the creation of a new home for the Westies Clubs.”

Ms Martin said that Westies has been part of the Alice Springs landscape for over thirty years and the rugby league side was around even before the club expanded into other sports.

“My Government has its own link to Westies as Sports Minister John Ah Kit was a rugby league player for them in the 70s and coached the team to a premiership in 1975,” she said.

“But it was Brian Cairns, an Alice rugby league stalwart, that has the right to be called the ‘Father of the West’s Sporting Club’.

“In an effort to get Commonwealth funding to help build a sporting club, he was told that being a rugby club wasn’t enough and had to be multi-functional with more than one sport.

“Brian took that to heart, enlisted the Melanka Aussie Rules Club, and then formed Netball, Basketball, Darts and Eight Ball clubs.

“As a result, the Westies Club became a licensed meeting place, for sportsmen and women in Alice, and also a popular lunch venue for teachers from Alice Springs High School.

“The new Gillen Club now takes its place but still supports all West’s sporting clubs.”