

urbanrenewal - Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

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Date: 4/16/2013 12:56 PM
Subject: Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy
Attachments: Newc revitalisation Submission.pdf

Please find attached my submission.

cheers

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In general the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy seems to put forth an attractive plan for a future Newcastle. Therefore, this response does not go through the very many plans and ideas covered in this very complex and large document, but instead focuses on what are the key issues that do not seem to be fully explained and considered.

1. Future of the rail corridor

Whilst an actual decision is welcome, in the absence of a regional transport plan the decision should be reviewed and the implications carefully considered in order to inform development of an alternate transport network solution for the entire city.

The corridor, its heritage significance, the proposed north-south connections between the city and the harbour, and the land around them requires well-considered, detailed master planning to ensure it does not become a 'waste-land'. The former rail corridor should be re-invented; another east-west connection is not required.

2. The need for revitalisation is not defined

It is suggested that a major shortcoming of the strategy is that it does not explain why the city is actually in need of revitalisation. It is obvious that the city has been in economic decline for an extended time, but if the reasons for this are not understood then the strategy is doomed to fail as have others before it. The key reasons for Newcastle CBD decline are:

- Retail activity has been pulled out of the city into suburban shopping centres leaving no limited retail attractions in CBD, particularly in terms of regional activities.
- Parking issues – lack of and high cost.
- City is unattractive and not a pleasant place to walk around – derelict buildings and poor public domain (few trees, unattractive, too strung out, mall lacking people, harbour/Honeysuckle area totally disconnected, no good view to harbour from city centre).
- No major attractors to bring people into city.
- Getting there by public transport is not easy (poor servicing by buses and trains) and most people in Newcastle, especially those in the wider area, would prefer to drive.
- Personal safety issues – not safe at night.
- Rail corridor – current arrangement (at grade and needing to be flanked by security fencing) divides city centre physically and visually from harbour foreshore/Honeysuckle

The Strategy needs to clarify the rationale for the proposed actions and define measurable benefits and performance measures. The Strategy needs to learn from the failures and successes (albeit limited) of previous plans and approaches to revitalisation (eg. opening the mall the traffic, re-paving the mall, street tree planting etc.).

3. Economic development focus

The desired role of the CBD in the regional commercial hierarchy must be defined. The CBD should not compete with regional shopping centres but rather establish a retail function that is a point of difference to attract businesses and visitors.

The expansion of suburban shopping centres affecting the Newcastle CBD crosses local government boundaries and is therefore beyond the control of Newcastle City Council. Rather than restrain market supply and demand, and revitalise the CBD at the expense of other areas, the CBD should instead offer something different. To this end, bulky goods retailing in the “West End” and a supermarket and discount store in what the Strategy calls “East End” (the real “East End” is between Newcastle and Nobbys Beach) is not supported.

A cruise-ship terminal has not been considered. It is an economic opportunity exclusive to the CBD.

Scale and nature of west end development out of character with Newcastle, it is too dense and too high. The mall should remain the heart of the CBD.

4. Stakeholder Engagement

The NSW Government itself in the *NSW Planning System Review Green Paper* (2012), strongly advocate collaborative planning and community engagement in plan preparation, however this Strategy has had very little consultation must less collaboration. The Strategy has been delivered (and presented at community information sessions) with little detail, limited disclosure and no transparency. Specialised communications planners should be used in community information sessions. Specialist skills and experience in explaining the process and outcomes would bolster the community support for the Strategy and improve the transparency and perception of the planning process.

5. Leadership and implementation

A specialist organisation must be created with the sole purpose of making the strategy work, with the budget and powers to do so. The entities listed in the Strategy do not have the renewal of Newcastle as their core business. The government must create and agency bourne of the region, practitioners from requisite disciplines and tiers of government.

6. Planning Controls

Revitalisation of the CBD needs economic investment and people. The CBD currently suffers from physical (mine subsidence, heritage) and planning (carparking, height, section94 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 contributions, development application timeframes, Section 68 Local Government Act 1993, Development Control Plan ambiguity and restrictions, uncertainty) constraints that put the CBD at an economic disadvantage and deter investment. incentives and

merit-based assessment of developments in the CBD is required to remove/offset these disadvantages.

The proposed single/dominant use zoning and restrictions on the mix of residential and other uses is not supported. This approach is contrary to planning best practice and conflicts with the DoPIs own expert economic advice from Hill PDA, that development needs a residential component to be feasible. Newcastle does not have the population numbers to support specialist districts. Every precinct must have a mix of uses to sustain life and activity both day and night. The land use split should evolve as a function of the market. Rather than prescriptive planning controls, adaptable building design is preferred to promote flexibility of building use and long term functionality.

In summary, Novocastrians are craving action! Swift action is needed in clarifying the above issues, establishing a specialist agency for implementation, assigning funding and releasing a schedule of staged and immediate implementation.