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DRAFT NEWCASTLE URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY 2012.

The document contains worthy elements and I acknowledge the work that has gone into its preparation. However, I am concerned about the lack of local consultation and the fact that if the strategy is implemented under the SEPP (Urban Renewal) 2012 the Newcastle LEP's will be over-ridden. This would directly contradict statements by the Minister for Planning and infrastructure that the NSW government have returned planning powers to local communities.

I attended the briefing given by the department on 20th February 2013 and consider it to be the worst event of its kind that I have attended in many years of involvement in community and civic affairs. This was due in the main to the arrogance of the convenor and his refusal to allow any consideration of matters that did not suit his agenda. The affair is unlikely to enhance the relationship between the NSW government and the citizens of Newcastle.

I welcome the emphasis on the importance of public transport but the recent decision of cabinet to truncate the Newcastle rail line and replace the trains with buses will result in traffic chaos as well as a general loss of public amenity. I realise that the proposal to close the line is not a part of the urban renewal strategy but to consider the strategy without reference to the rail line beyond the single paragraph in the transport section is unrealistic. The line should be retained, landscaped, and the crossings and bridges that have been removed in recent years restored. I suggest that the 1981 Newcastle Urban Design and Harbour Foreshore Scheme be revisited.

The intention of retaining the built heritage of the city is welcome but the strategy's success will be determined by the implementation. I consider this and the retention of view corridors (particularly in relation to the cathedral) to be one of the most critical aspects of the entire strategy. The view of the cathedral from some aspects has already been compromised by the inappropriate development of the former hospital site.

The strategy should not be pursued at the expense of the other areas of Newcastle. A degree of resentment has become apparent in Western Newcastle over Newcastle Council's perceived obsession with the CBD. I live in an outer suburb and can attest that many of my neighbours rarely or never travel into the City. A number of the

outer shopping strips are surviving and in some cases doing well (e.g. Beaumont Street in Hamilton and Nelson Street in Wallsend) under the stewardship of local business associations operating without the assistance of government subsidies. The statement that *'limiting expansion of out-of-centre retail in other parts of Newcastle will also strengthen the city centre as a retail destination'* is particularly alarming. The coercive implications are unlikely to be popular or successful and seem to be curiously at odds with the espoused principles of a Coalition Government. A succession of ratepayer-funded bodies has been attempting to 'revitalise' the City in recent decades with a marked lack of success and it is not reasonable to penalise their more competent suburban counterparts.

I believe that the involvement of the Honeysuckle Development Corporation is a matter of concern. Their track record is appalling and much of their effort seems to have been directed towards moving business and amenities away from the CBD. During the process they have succeeded in creating a permanent barrier between the city and the waterfront in the form of lines and blocks of third-rate buildings and the destruction of the Merewether Street view corridor.

Newcastle has suffered from a series of bad decisions at all levels of government. I cite the unnecessary demolition of some of our most valuable buildings after the 1989 earthquake, the sale and subsequent over-development of the site of the former Royal Newcastle Hospital, the decision to replace the Courthouse with a new building in the Civic area, and the recent decision to truncate the railway line.

An observer would be justified in claiming that these decisions and countless others directly benefit property developers at the expenses of the wider community. I submit that the urban renewal strategy in its current form will do likewise, and benefit the few at the expense of the many.

David Horkan.