

# NEWCASTLE URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY 2012

*Submission – NSW Planning and Infrastructure*

*Via: [urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au)*



**Newcastle City Centre** – a vital, innovative hub, rich in culture, creativity and heritage; heartland of a resourceful, smart city and contemporary life-style.

**NEWCASTLE  
NOW**

**March 15, 2013**

## Introduction

On behalf of Newcastle Now (Newcastle Business Improvement Association) I am pleased to present, on behalf of the Board, our submission to the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012.

Newcastle Now appreciates the Government's initiative in undertaking this planning exercise and the Board wishes to assure the Department of our enthusiasm to play a role in the ongoing revitalisation of the city centre.

In particular we would be keen to support the strategy by taking on the role of Business Improvement Coordinator – a contribution we are specifically constituted to perform.

Our submission reflects the views expressed to us by our stakeholders – the property owners, business operators and residential community of the Newcastle city centre.

We will be happy to provide further advice or work with the Department and with the City of Newcastle for further planning and implementation.



Edward Duc

*pp. Michael Nelson C.E.O.*

Chair

Newcastle Business Improvement Association (Newcastle NOW)



## Contents

NEWCASTLE URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY 2012 .....	1
Introduction .....	2
The City Centre's Business and Community Improvement Association .....	4
Summary .....	5
Challenges and Issues .....	5
Key Messages .....	9
Our Commitment .....	11
General Approach .....	12
Guiding principles .....	12
Place-based Initiatives .....	12
Economic Initiatives .....	13
Transport-related Initiatives .....	13
Planning Framework .....	13
Development Control Plan .....	14
Infrastructure .....	14



## NEWCASTLE NOW

### The City Centre's Business and Community Improvement Association

Newcastle Now is an independent business association whose members are drawn from the property owners, business operators, communities, organisations and agencies who are committed to the revitalisation of the city's CBD – a CBD like that of many other great cities that are undergoing transformation.

The Association represents the interests of over 1500 businesses and property owners and increasingly provides a voice for the city centre's residential community.

Previously a Main Street Committee, the Association is now an independent body, funded through a Special Benefit Rate levied by Council. The Board is made up of a cross-section of property owners, business operators, community members and professional service providers.

Over the twenty years of its community contributions, the organisation has undertaken economic development projects, provided place-making, marketing and events, worked with Council to research issues and develop policy and strategy.

Our funding is anchored through a Special Benefit Rate struck by Council on city centre property owners.

We work closely with Council, government agencies, industry and community organisations and our stakeholders.

For more information:  
[www.newcastlenow.org.au](http://www.newcastlenow.org.au)



#### **VISION**

*A vibrant city centre where businesses and professional services are successful and residents, workers and visitors enjoy a unique lifestyle.*

#### **MISSION**

*We will make a significant positive impact on the growth of city centre business, cultural and social activity.*

#### **VALUES**

*We value partnerships and open communication; we prioritize stakeholders' needs and we exercise sound, ethical financial management.*

#### **STRATEGY**

*Our achievements will be based on a foundation of business and community vision and energies.*

## Summary

Newcastle Now wishes to acknowledge the achievement represented by the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy and endorses the principles and intent of the plan.

Our stakeholders appreciate the fact that, for the first time in recent years, there is the opportunity for a whole-of-government approach in which business and community can participate.

We recognise the specific expertise that will be provided through Newcastle Council, the Property Council, UDIA and special interest groups. Our aim is to represent the general interests of our stakeholders (the property, business and residential communities) and to reflect their issues and aspirations for future consideration.

Our comments and suggestions fall within this framework of positive response.

As the city centre's formally constituted Business Improvement Association, we are keen to be recognised as the appropriate body to work with Council and other agencies to support the Economic Development Strategy.

## Challenges and Issues

Our stakeholders have variously expressed concerns on the following key issues.

- *Strategic Alignment.* We are sometimes unable to see clear links between what we recognise as CBD livability goals or identified problems and the proposed strategies. To ensure that the good things are not lost, future development strategies need to be clearly linked to these goals and problems. Examples might include late-night disorder, safety, community meeting and rest zones, way-finding and transport links. Others include the impact of methadone clinic services on surrounding businesses; lack of public toilets, bus shelters and other amenities; access routes for people with limited mobility or with prams; and evening safety issues for people attending theatres, restaurants and training programs.
- *World class advice.* We want the opportunity to benefit from leading-edge design and thought leadership. International expertise should be linked to the design, architecture and engineering expertise of our **University** so that there can be a broad community of understanding as to how this city can continue to grow and develop into a unique destination. This understanding should encompass our residents and businesses, Council officers, the development and investment community, professional services companies and our research and training bodies.
- *Catalyst policy and projects.* We endorse the need for a 'catalyst policy' to provide surety and incentives to the investment community. However, we note that some sites outlined as such projects in this document are in private ownership and we would prefer to see an indication of how they might be brought to fruition. As rightly recognised, there are a number of neglected sites in our city that are close to the community's heart with significance that is deep but hard to articulate. We would like these sites to become catalyst sites with incentives for re-adaptive use that protect them whilst serving as generators of innovative activities and economic flow-on. We particularly note the buildings formerly known as the Post Office, David Jones, The Store, The Star Hotel,

Newcastle Railway Station and the Regional Museum. Incentives for investors and developers and perhaps even end-users should be considered. We also wish to support the smaller-scale adaptive re-uses which can add layers and surprises to a cityscape.

- *Building the City's brand as a destination for investment and tourism.* We emphasise the need for enthusiastic promotion of the city's attractions for investment and tourism.

### **Planning**

- *Intensification.* We endorse the aspirations for intensification in the West End and the focus on commercial development. However, we have heard concerns that it is potentially flawed with underlying environmental constraints contributing to a high level of development risk that has proved in the past to be a disincentive to development investment. We ask for further economic modeling that takes account of development viability prior to the longer-term planning being implemented.
- *Prescriptiveness.* Our stakeholders are concerned at the level of prescriptiveness and the potential for that to translate into bland uniformity similar to other urban centres. We are a strongly artistic community, with an excellent and reasonably preserved built heritage, a visible maritime presence and outstanding beaches. The city centre has developed over time into distinct precincts with their own character. We request more openness to variety, distinct local variations and merit-based building design with reflective public domain characteristics.

### **Implementation**

- *Funding.* We understand the status of the document but note that it seems to lack a specific statement of funding intent. We also understand that Council has expressed reservations about the proposed reliance on Section 94 contributions.
- *Mine subsidence Investment.* As a government commitment to Newcastle, we ask the Government to consider the potential for the existing compensation fund to be used as an investment fund. This could be directed to capitalising remediation of those agreed sites and precincts. By doing this, optimum development uplift can be provided to projects that will deliver priority economic or social outcomes. This would help intensify development investment and instill business confidence.
- *Timing and Deliverability.* Our city has seen many planning documents in the past. Whilst components of plans have become reality, many have not. We would like the final report to give a strong emphasis on reasonable projections to enable business to plan ahead. That said, we endorse the approach to temporary interventions as a means of creating the immediate sense of change and vibrancy. We believe that **Newcastle Now**, through its close links with Council and its established precinct committees who have been actively engaged in localized placemaking, events and business activation programs for several years is an appropriate vehicle to work with Council and other agencies to support these aims.

### **Place**

- *East End – Former Courthouse Precinct.* We recognise the decision points that led to the relocation of the Courthouse to Civic. That decision will have a major impact on existing business in the East End. The community and economic impact of this initiative should also be addressed within this plan. Our stakeholders are keen to preserve the unique character and the surprising vistas provided by this hilly area – and in particular the view corridors to the Cathedral.

- *Darby St.* It is essential that Darby St – a key gateway to the city and closely linked to the cultural facilities be incorporated into the planning mix. Traders there have prepared a Master Plan outlining their wishes for their precinct. That should be considered.
- *Cottage Creek, Marketown Precinct and King St.* The Marketown retail precinct and its relationship to National Park, King St (a busy transport corridor) and connections through to Hunter St and Wickham station is an existing important generator of activity with over 100,000 visits per week. This precinct seems to be under-represented in the discussion other than a reference to Cottage Creek. The recent extension to the shopping centre has generated specialty retail in the surrounding blocks and it is now an important hub and activator for other businesses.
- *West End Character.* Changes proposed for the West End will fundamentally alter the existing character and business mix. We ask that West End business and community stakeholders be consulted in the planning phase to determine their views on public domain design and an ongoing enhancement of the precinct's unique style. This area also has the issue of the way in which buildings turn their backs to the railway corridor.
- *Wickham and the Marina Precinct.* Wickham is a mixed use community encompassing the marina, residences, light industry and a growing base of innovative small businesses and artisans. It should be better connected to the West End through harbour-side public domain and safe, attractive connections. We endorse the proposal for a new master plan for the area.
- *Gateways.* The concept of the need for strong gateway treatments for the city is not clear. Darby Street and the West End entry points (Union, King and Darby Streets) can be used to identify the three core city zones and to announce, through good design, the character and offerings of those zones. Local business and communities of interest should be closely involved in these planning exercises so that we do not end up with homogenized outcomes but instead have distinctive representation of their areas.
- *Permeability, connectedness and safety-by-design.* We endorse these principles. However, following up on the question of problem/strategy alignment, we wonder if expenditure on upgrading the Mall over-bridge is required if the rail is to be cut.
- *Greening.* We request a strong emphasis on greening across the city centre but ask that advice be sought from businesses on problems with leaves and roots and also on matters such as signage and business visibility.
- *Heritage.* We strongly endorse the emphasis on maintenance of our heritage and request that all buildings and structures on local, State or Federal registers be protected and the surrounding public domain reflect their history and use.

### **Economic Initiatives**

- It is our view that the analysis of potential economic growth and the inferred focus on the city centre again becoming a general, retail centre is poorly founded in analysis of the retail sector and the potential of other sectors to revitalize our streets. We urge a better, broader analysis prior to planning and support strategies being implemented. We need to future-proof our economy and note that recent government documents on the future of Sydney are much better founded in a concept of future. We recognise that our city has a history based on resources, maritime and manufacturing. However, we believe that our future should be linked to a greater reliance on the emerging knowledge economy. We ask for specific strategies to support that potential.



## Transport

- *Transport – Rail Services.* **Newcastle Now** (with some reservations) appreciated and supported the Government's announcement of its intention to terminate the heavy rail line at Wickham. *That is, in so doing, we endorsed the principle that rail would continue to the city centre's gateway.* We note the divisive nature of the railway debate and recognise the need to find the best possible solution and compromise. We also note that the projected increase in jobs and residents, along with an emphasis on public transport and sustainability mean that future transport needs may change radically, particularly for the West End. We therefore reiterate that *if* rail services to Newcastle Station are to be suspended in favour of a terminal to the west, it **must** be at Wickham. It is with considerable dismay we saw media reports that rail services may terminate short of the city centre. We **strongly** disagree with these later suggestions. Transport arrangements are fundamental to the way our city works and may work in the future. Should the Wickham option lack feasibility (despite the previous announcements which we had assumed had sufficient background to them to be credible) any alternative options that suggest termination short of Wickham **must** be re-assessed with full analysis, modeling and economic impact studies. Buses from Hamilton or Broadmeadow are not an appropriate solution. Furthermore, the rail corridor and infrastructure must remain in public hands to allow for future re-planning options if necessary.
- *Transport – Integration.* We ask that further work be undertaken on the best way to achieve transport integration allowing for direct travel between key nodes in the city – University, Tighes Hill TAFE, John Hunter Hospital, the airport, major shopping centres, beaches and cultural facilities. We urge that the existing free-zone be maintained or, at least, an alternative all-day "central zone bus-hopper ticket" (at a price-point similar to the Seniors Excursion ticket) be provided to allow for multiple trips within the city centre. This will encourage a lower car-usage rate but resolve the problem of the 3km length of the city for people who wish to do business along the stretch at multiple enterprises. More park and ride options should be provided at key points so people can easily access rail or bus services, including people from Port Stephens, Maitland and other regional centres who regularly use the system. These arrangements and facilities should be planned in conjunction with other Councils and linked transport plans.
- *Transport – Low speed environment.* A pedestrian priority, low speed environment is strongly supported with cycle provision integrated with through lanes on Hunter Street and neighbouring areas. The reassignment of road space for active lifestyle amenity to support business growth is endorsed. We commend the priority given to upgraded cycle facilities, but have reservations about the detail. We ask that further discussions take place with the cycling community before further planning is undertaken.
- *Transport – Impact of changes.* We ask that (wherever possible) the existing transport micro nodes within the city centre be supported through the period of change with alternative traffic generators and attractors through placemaking opportunities.



## Key Messages

1. Newcastle Now, the City Centre Business Improvement Association, is an organisation representing the businesses, property owners and community of Newcastle's CBD. Funded by a Special Benefit Rate and working in close collaboration with Council, Newcastle Now wishes to express a **strong interest** in taking on the role of Local Business Coordinator to prepare and implement a Business Improvement Plan.
2. The Association **endorses the basis of the plan** in place-based, economic and transport-related components. We strongly endorse the emphasis on an improved public domain.
3. To drive transformational change there must be a **catalytic investment** that significantly creates population density and therefore demand for services, residential living and recreation amenity. A commitment to a full city **university campus** is strongly supported. If that can be achieved in way that also serves our professional services, tourism and visitor economies and emerging industries, it would be an added element to future growth. We note the extra need for affordable housing to support the strategy.
4. Our city prides itself on its **cultural and artisan strengths**. We enjoy a rich, diverse and participatory social and cultural life. We wish to protect this diversity and the growing recognition of the role that the creative industries do, and can, play in our city centre economic life and revitalization. We want to preserve these important elements as the intensification occurs because we believe it will come to characterize a unique city ecosystem. We ask that specific strategies be devised and implemented as part of the economic and social planning related to the urban renewal strategy.



5. **The streetscape and public domain** must offer a diversity of user experience and visual interest and encourage community participation in the design process to capture cultural and heritage interpretation - "the spirit of place". We support the idea of "temporary" streetscape place making initiatives that will draw and retain people in the CBD. This will support local business. We urge active strategies to support retention of the small, interesting buildings which give our city layers of scale and human dimensions.
6. **Civic Square Proposition** - To reinforce the city heart and realise stronger links between the library, art gallery, university functions and war memorial legacy a distinctive civic square is strongly supported to as an investment in the future of cultural exchange and knowledge. This proposition may include a north/south green spine connecting civic square to the harbour embracing the museum precinct - a bold investment beyond the envisaged north/south pedestrian connections.
7. We note with some disappointment the lack of statements about **King and Darby Streets** and attention to their role in the city centre. They are integral to functioning, livability and commercial patterns.

8. We endorse changes to the **planning framework** and urge procedural rationalization to minimize delays and development costs to incentivise investment. We ask for re-consideration of flexibility, commercial viability and prescriptiveness of residential/commercial balance in individual buildings. We need to recognise end-user practicalities such as strata rulings that may inhibit investment in tourism accommodation.
9. We question the primacy of retail in a CBD setting, given the competition of the major urban zones within the LGA and the changing realities of emerging economic patterns. We urge a more analytical approach to business mix opportunities supporting tourism, creative industries, health and lifestyle, professional services and the emerging digital/creative economy. To support this, we can offer a data set from 2004-2012 reflecting the business mix and vacancy trends. We want to keep our young graduates in town and to turn the city's brain drain around.
10. We would like to see further modeling of the proposed intensive development zones and in particular the potential for excessive shading, wind tunnels and flood impacts. We hope to see further analysis of the impact of undermining, flooding events and water table on the commercial viability of the options provided. Intensifying built form on a flood plain is environmentally marginal and exposes the West End to climate change vulnerability and extreme weather events. This has the potential to seriously impact the streetscape character and building floor levels which will diminish the end user experience and urban livability attributes. We ask for further modeling studies to help understand the potential ramifications on the building and streetscape design.
11. We reiterate community views that existing railway stations should stay in public hands.
12. We strongly endorse the need to improve connectivity across the rail corridor to the harbour and encourage options to achieve this in the short term.



## Our Commitment

***Newcastle Now, through its Board is willing to commit to the following actions.***

1. Newcastle Now is prepared to undertake the role of Business Improvement Coordination (requesting some financial support to engage a suitably qualified practitioner) and commit to collaboration and engagement with Council, city-centre stakeholders, government agencies and the University and TAFE.
2. We will work with Council and business to undertake place-based improvement programs that reflect precinct vision and character.
3. We commit to work with Council and others to brand and market the city centre, to undertake activation projects and to support cultural and creative activation.
4. We commit to work with government agencies, the University and our business community to grow economic prosperity based on the knowledge economy and our cultural and artistic strengths.





### General Approach

We endorse the vision outlined for Newcastle and the Newcastle 2030 plan and the practical strategies within the urban renewal approach that will support their achievement. We further endorse the emphasis on livability, sustainability, diversity, housing growth, tourism and a rich and layered entertainment and evening economy to support business and cultural activity.

### Guiding principles

Newcastle Now endorses the scope of the stated **Guiding Principles** and the recognition of the inter-relationships between factors that can lead to future vibrancy, livability, social cohesion and prosperity. We appreciate the search for balance between our heritage values and the need for jobs, homes and modern commercial viability. However, we are concerned that the vision for our city's future is based on an old paradigm and does not adequately reflect the potential for a new concept of how it might work to make Newcastle's CBD a distinctive, knowledge-based, culturally rich and socially cohesive "new city".

### Place-based Initiatives

- We also strongly endorse the focus on **Place-based Initiatives** and draw attention to the success of our long-standing investment and collaborative work, in partnership with Council, Government agencies, residents and business, in such projects.
- Again we reiterate the importance of our stakeholders being involved in planning and discussions on the future character of their areas. Place-based planning should reflect local visions and uses.
- Without detracting from the plan to rebuild Hunter St as our premier street, we want further recognition of the role of King and Darby Streets and specific planning for them within the hierarchy of city centre services and attractions.
- We ask specifically for a laneways strategy, permeability and positive greening across the CBD and an emphasis on night-time way-finding and innovative lighting. Newcastle Council has long been at the forefront of planning for sustainability. We would like to see that reflected in future urban design and the built environment.

### Economic Initiatives

- ***We endorse the proposition that a dedicated Business Improvement resource should be incorporated into future programs. Newcastle Now is well-placed and willing to deliver those services. Supporting us to do so would be a cost-effective solution. The Association has a well-qualified Board and a secure, stable income base through the Special Benefit Rate. It has qualified experienced staff, excellent networks and a proud record of achievement in relevant projects over many years.***
- We ask the question “should the city’s future growth across the board be predominately based on retail?” We are of the view that a better alternative would be to leverage the existing retail environment in the West End and support specialty clusters elsewhere. The digital economy, health, wellbeing and lifestyle businesses, opportunities for boutique businesses servicing the creative industries and high-end fashion and service-based sector offer the same opportunities for vibrancy and foot-traffic between concentrated nodes of retail. Support for specialization in emerging industries, including government procurement policies may lead to a better balance and have the capacity to attract youth and entrepreneurial businesses.
- We endorse the emphasis on support for mixed activities in the East End and its future development including entertainment options as an approach to re-crafting the city’s evening economy and its current over-emphasis on alcohol-related, youth offerings.
- We further endorse recent State Government support for co-working spaces and ask that specific strategies be put in place to assist Newcastle Now’s programs in this area of business incubation and innovation projects.

### Transport-related Initiatives

- Newcastle Now strongly endorses the promotion of a shift to efficient, cost-effective public transport options and improved pedestrian and cyclist networks and dedicated cycle lanes.
- We have strong views (expressed above) that the rail line should extend to Wickham and be supported with frequent, cheap (or free) bus services within the CBD. We further note that our beaches are exceptional but they are not directly serviced by public transport. That should be remedied. We also note that transport infrastructure such as bus shelters, seating and lighting are not adequate. Proper provision for these should be made at every stop in the current fare-free zone.
- We urge further traffic modeling and support temporary measures to gauge the impact of proposed changes before final decisions are made.
- Connectivity across the rail lines is essential as is management of car-parking. We particularly note the negative impact that parking fees have on the city centre when other commercial zones within the LGA provide free parking. This has a major negative impact on some types of businesses.
- We ask that further consultation be undertaken with the cycling community as they have significant safety concerns about some solutions outlined in this strategy.
- Car-parking, is as rightly targeted in this document, a major issue in the CBD, especially for small enterprises that are not destinations in their own right.

### Planning Framework

- We support initiatives designed to increase intensification of usage and the growing of commercial activities in the West End alongside ongoing protection for the special low-scale characteristics of the East End heritage zone.



- We endorse the proposed rationalization of zoning, heights; FSR's and note that provision for flood impact will be included in later planning. We argue for reduced prescriptiveness and increased flexibility and attention to commercial reality.
- We note the generous height limits and floorspace ratios to support investment but raise questions about the effects of further controls such as the development requirement for 20-metre street front offsets should they apply to re-adaptive use of small, older buildings. This should be clarified.
- We request further modeling of the impact of intensive development in some zones for wind-tunnel effects and shading and for increasing understanding of the impacts of undermining and the water table on commercial viability of projects. Extensive discussions with potential end-users may assist in devising solutions.

### Development Control Plan

- Intensive commercial land use in the West End, up to 90m height, will potentially reduce the solar amenity, increase wind velocity, increase urban heat load, and colonise views and vistas to the harbour. Is this proposition conducive to optimising ground floor retail and business activity?
- We note the omission of King St sites in the Special Areas list.
  - There is significant pedestrian, car and bicycle traffic in the areas around Marketown Retail Precinct and the National Park sporting facilities.
  - There is a need for good, safe connections from the National Park/Marketown hub, through to the Spotlight corner and Wickham Station and other transport connections. These street corners are not attractive and provision for transport connections, place-based improvements and amenity is important, particularly given the issues with school kids, drug sales etc.
- We also note the potential for Civic Park to be a 'special place' and community hub and "town square", linking town hall, art gallery and library, conservatorium, the courts and the waterfront. The special nature of the war memorials, railway/maritime heritage and cultural precinct makes it unique in this region.
- We ask that the special role of Wheeler Place as an active space be retained but also suggest that palms are not suitable for shade needs. Good shade increases usage as a community space.

### Infrastructure

- We note the current strong status of road, water and sewerage infrastructure.
- However, we ask questions about the following as local anecdotes already report intermittent difficulties for business and residents in:
  - Electricity capacity
  - Fibre (NBN) capability
  - Poor phone and internet reception – significant constraint on business.
- We encourage greater attention of the potential of the Harbour foreshore to generate local and regional visits to the city and determine appropriate infrastructure needs to enhance our role as a destination.

