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Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy Submission

The revitalisation phase of Newcastle City Centre is well past and we are now accelerating into the infill and growth phase.

The Lower Hunter and in particular Newcastle LGA is absolutely booming and you'd better believe it.

A drive through the suburbs will show lot of new houses, unit complexes, upgraded schools, expanded shopping centres and a plethora of new factories, warehouses and places of business.

The movements of motor vehicles actively going about their business on new and upgraded roadways is indicative of major activity and a boom environment.

Education, entertainment and sporting activity is flourishing often in new or redeveloped venues.

Recent Census data supports the boom time with greater housing and visitor accommodation supporting the record high population.

The Newcastle City Centre is often the target of cries of despair. Here too, the revitalisation phase is over. The reality is that new developments and rebuilds have totally changed the area. This original revitalisation and the now active infill and

growth phase is fuelled by individuals commonly working collectively. Single projects and groups like Landcom, GPT and HDC cannot on their own change the place.

It is the home occupier, shop keeper and small business people who drive the direction into the future.

Without these individuals all the projects come to a grinding halt. It is the individuals that set the pace and character into the future.

The Newcastle beach precinct has had major works that are now settling in and adapting to the new role.

Newcastle East has turned the corner with new buildings, new residents and a new level of social wealth.

The foreshore all the way from Nobbys to Maryville is the product of near complete major revitalisation. The grassed open space areas east of Newcastle Station are in danger of being over utilised due to the rapid growth in events and activities.

Newcastle West has also passed the revitalisation phase with the rebuild of Latex house, the demise of the Bellevue Hotel and the demolition of the Empire Hotel and the replacement of the Palais with a huge KFC and Pizza Hut.

Even the old picture theatre has a new role as a modern church and the old museum is on the road to being converted into housing.

From a retail perspective the revitalisation phase is also over. The Marketown shopping complex is flourishing and is developing into a credible replacement for the shops along Hunter Street. This modern very well appointed shopping complex is the future of retail in inner Newcastle.

Planners should now set about linking Marketown via skyways to the utilities, including Hunter Water and the other buildings of Honeysuckle, that have been set apart because rail crossings have been removed. The Hill, the new Law Court and other inner buildings and landmarks also lend themselves to be linked to the foreshore and transport hubs via skyways.

It is interesting to note that much of the revitalisation activities have been the product of public and private developers doing their own thing and not as part of a grand development.

The growth and infill phase we are now in will continue the themes that are now set in concrete by the revitalisation activities.

Mine subsidence and the shortage of tourism activities are two areas requiring considerable thought. Both require some thinking "outside the square".

How about using National Park for high rise apartments surrounding "Cottage Lake" with a harbour navigable channel to it and what about placing the netball courts and other sport venues in the middle of the current CBD on the mine sites?

The Intercity rail to Newcastle Station must continue to be a major driver for growth and infill. This will build on the major contribution the Intercity rail has made to revitalisation by bringing tourists, backpackers, event attendees and others to enjoy the natural amenities and heritage sites. This is especially notable since the introduction of Funday Sunday rail fares and the publicity resulting from the Lonely Planet listing of Newcastle in the top 10 tourist venues.

New transport including light rail along the Hunter Coastline from Swansea to Nelsons Bay via a harbour bridge, Newcastle

Station and the Airport could be a vital item of infrastructure for growth, infill and tourism.

The booming city centre of Newcastle and surrounds are no different to your street or my street with some buildings clear leaders and some a little behind.

Growth and infill should be marketed strongly and supported by promotional material espousing in glowing terms the assets that are here in this great tourist destination.

The community and civic leaders should express confidence in the future of the city and stimulate a new mood of optimism replacing the uncertainty created by those who have doubted the value of its rail facilities.

The word “revitalisation” must now be struck out of the Hunter’s dictionary.