

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 17.03.2013

I support certain areas of the Urban Renewal Strategy 2012. Some are:

- Reinstating Hunter Street as the main street in Newcastle
- Place based initiatives as discussed
- Car Sharing
- Laneways extended
- Residential – providing a greater mix of residential types
- CBD – moving this to the West End
- Night time economy – developing small bar and café business operations
- Competitions for design excellence in certain types of development
- Highlighting the Public Domain and the benefits when this is successful
- Permeable city with easy access and use
- Landscaping, gardens, community growing areas etc.
- Priority to cyclists and pedestrians - cycleway
- Footpath widening

However I am not convinced with this model for Renewal. My specific concerns are outlined below but in general, I would rather see an organic 'RENEW' led strategy as outlined by the South Australian Government in the document "Economic Benefits of City Activation and Renewal - by the Integrated Design Commission – Improving Life through Design". The results of this model is an eclectic, arts based, vibrant economy with an Adaptive Reuse of buildings.

Comments on specific sections below.

PAGE	SECTION	TITLE	COMMENT
xviii	Vision	Guiding Principles	There is no mention of Sustainability as a Guiding Principal. Central to our Vision should be to see Newcastle City as an exemplar city for Green development principles and Sustainability. Absent from the Vision Statement, these principles have been treated very lightly throughout the remaining document. Sustainable Issues should be elevated and reworked through the document with more detailed strategies and outcomes. I note that Section 3.15 explains the framework for Sustainability within which this document sits. The concern is that the lack of Vision in the direction of Ecological Sustainability is particularly evident in the graphic representation of our future city as presented in this document. Where are the green walls, roof top gardens, innovative built forms with new technologies (such as CH2 in Melbourne)?
14	1.3	City Centre Vision	In the 2006 City Centre Vision, Under the key directions, it is worth noting one of their directions was - <i>Ensuring human-scale development at the pedestrian level</i>. With lot amalgamation and large floor plates in the Commercial Zone in the West End, this outcome will be very difficult to achieve.

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20	1.4	Planning Framework	The Height of 90m and FSR of 1:8 as proposed for certain areas of the West End, is of concern regarding the built outcome. The West End has a diversity and eclectic character that will be completely overshadowed or destroyed by the bulk and scale of buildings which comply with these height and FSR requirements. I question the need for a 90m high building in this area. It would be preferable to have 4 x 20m buildings which would result in less overshadowing of the street and Public Domain. I would also argue for a lower FSR. At street level buildings of this scale usually have little relationship to the street, making Place Making initiatives (to enliven the Public Domain), difficult or of little value. Recently built Commercial buildings in the Honeysuckle area have ground floor elevations that disengage to the street. We do not want to repeat these mistakes. Any new Commercial buildings in Newcastle West need Strategies relevant to the existing character of the zone to overcome this commonly seen failure of large Commercial Buildings. I note that the document calls for <i>Active frontages for Commercial Development</i> and would like • Smaller scale tenancies at street level • The bulk of the ground floor area broken to allow atrium or open space • Greening of the lower floor elevations • Consultation with tenants for the lower level to ensure success rather than untenable spaces which have often remained vacant for 5 years.
			Another proposed Key Control for the West end is • <i>Requiring that development in the commercial core zone has at least one street frontage of 20m or more.</i> This encourages lot amalgamation and lack of diversity. I would request this strategy be rethought to allow for more adaptive reuse of some existing noteworthy buildings. Does this preclude any development of smaller scale lots? If the smaller buildings are demolished, there is a great risk of Developers creating a homogenous, bland streetscapes that do not create any opportunity for diversity and interest for the West End Community.
62	4.2	Guiding Principles	Ecologically Sustainable Innovations should be highlighted here as a driving Principle behind the City's development Strategies. This is not just about Greening streets and buildings but innovative systems and technologies. Incentives could be implemented to encourage excellence in this area.

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78	4.3.1	Flexibility between activity nodes	Currently many businesses along Hunter Street, located at Ground Level, have no visual surveillance or relationship with the street. Granted that it will not be possible to activate the entire length of Hunter Street at the onset of the Strategy, however there could be a Street Activation Plan put in place to gain achievable passive activity along the street. One suggestion is to have a percentage of each business elevation open to the street, adding liveliness to both sides of the window!
82	4.3.2	Public Domain	The Image at the bottom of this page does not show how the cars and pedestrians share the space. It is an uninspiring image in terms of activating a Public area. There is no public activity, public art etc. – wrong graphics – need something innovative
86	4.3.3	Public Domain	Definitely support the Bosquet Option . The planting of less but larger shade trees will provide a more flexible, usable Public space. I do find the amount of attention (8 pages) given to this one issue disproportional.
94	4.3.4	Position the west end as the city's future CBD	As a resident of the West End, the opening paragraph describing the West End zone is simplistic and does not fully describe the nature of this area. It is described as <i>Housing showroom and bulky goods, retail, car dealerships and self-storage.</i> By the omission of smaller businesses such as tattoo artists, sign writers, art galleries, cafes, book shops etc., going from a bulky goods area to large scale commercial is not such a big leap. However there are pockets within the West End that are vibrant, edgy and different to other zones in the city. We don't want to lose the character of the West End and point out that has not been acknowledged accurately within the Urban Renewal Strategy. Granted this is the most suitable position for the CBD to be located, we ask for more detailed strategies and acknowledgement of the varied character of this area to ensure our zone is not homogenized into a new "Chatswood / St Leonards" style of commercial zone.
94	4.3.4	Vision about opportunities for precinct – Railway Interchange	The new transport interchange at Wickham is supported. Since the announcement of this decision there have been reports of the interchange going to Broadmeadow. In principal I do not support this as it will undermine the renewal of Newcastle West as the CBD. To have the trains stop at Broadmeadow would draw resources away from the West End and lengthen the time for the Urban renewal at the West End.
96	4.3.4	Cottage Creek	If a way could be found to overcome the Flooding issues, the Bridge Option linking both sides of the Cottage Creek would be the preferred option.

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98	4.3.4	Birdwood Park	I acknowledge there is great opportunity for Birdwood park to enhance the Public Domain within the West End. The graphic representing the future image of the preferred outcome is of concern. Granted it is only an Artists impression, however these things tend to guide the built reality. My concerns are with the representation of the built form. The elevations of the Ground floor tenancies have very little activation and create, in reality, quite an alienating street elevation. The scale and massing of this elevation would not help with surveillance of the park or offer interactive activities for the users of the park. Birdwood park has very limited uses at present. It is bounded by very fast traffic and the main opportunity to soften and create interaction is through this King Street elevation.
102	4.3.6	Supporting the City's Heritage	The 5 Case Studies presented by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects are great examples and would be wonderful additions to any city. I would like to see more of our buildings earmarked for restoration rather than demolition. I have concerns that more of our significant buildings will fall into disrepair and will not be viable to develop. I would like to see the Adaptive Reuse approach as a primary approach and strategy.
116	4.4.3	Bulky Goods retailing	Most Bulky Goods Stores are situated where pedestrian activity is not a priority as they typically create Streetscapes which are alienating and difficult to activate. I would argue that Bulky Goods are not the correct retail outlet for any area of the future CBD of Newcastle. With good design it may be possible to make this work but there is an inherent conflict with this decision. I would argue that it should be in the Wickham region off Honeysuckle, where an Industrial Estate is already established. Surely more residential or Artist Workshops would be better located in the existing Bulky Store locations rather than reinforcing a use that is already causing a problem for this area. Why not have a wonderful Artists Precinct as in other great cities.
138	5.1.1	Zoning	Areas of Newcastle that do not have residential components are alienating and currently dangerous places after businesses close down for the night. To create a Living City as outlined in this document, I would argue that all zones in the Hunter Street area, including the Commercial Zone, need to incorporate a percentage of Residential into each project to overcome the mistakes a lot of cities have encountered. To have a "living city" it needs different user groups occupying the buildings and streets at different times of the day. (Jane Jacobs theory) The Mixed use Zone is mandating a 25% of Commercial space within this zone— why not have the Commercial Zone with a certain percentage of Residential?

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184	5.3.8	The Store	The image on page 185 is not clear in its representation of the potential heights of the surrounding buildings. On page 186, there is a 90m high building between the back of the Store and the Railway Corridor. This is not represented in this image. In fact the height of the building to the rear of the site appears to reduce. The laneway between the 90m high building and the Store appears to only service the buildings. If the laneway was increased to 10m it could potentially be an active, vibrant part of the development. We should not be designing in more laneways that have zero activation and negative street addresses. There are many laneways in Newcastle West and their potential is huge, especially in activating night time bars, art galleries, artist's workshops and smaller scale evening nodes.
198	5.7	Active Frontages	Within the Commercial Zone, the amount of "Blank Walls" any street elevation should occupy (especially at the street level) needs to be allocated. Typically, Commercial buildings have opaque glass to most elevations and an empty disengaging entry foyer with zero activity and activation. The suggestion of tactile materials and architectural treatments is fine to some degree but it will not work over huge expanses of Street elevations.
202	6.1	Implementation	There needs to be interim Strategies in place to address the attitude of building owners who are in a "holding pattern" and not willing to address building maintenance until the City starts to develop. Many buildings have become dilapidated whilst waiting for change to happen i.e. others to take the risk first. I am not sure how this can be managed or whose jurisdiction it falls under, but it is a significant problem.

Extra points

1. ARTISTS

Newcastle has the highest number of Artists per Capita than any other city in Australia. We are a city of Artists which the Strategy is not representing. The Strategy could incorporate opportunities for Artists to be included in decisions as they were in Melbourne City Council's HC2 Building.

2. LOCAL CHARACTER

There are quite a few examples of new commercial buildings and planning decisions within Newcastle that do not reflect the character of the region and are still not favourably considered by Novocastrians. For example

- The Crown Plaza Hotel on the Foreshore – State Government approved – fake Edwardian detailing - Blocks vision and links to the foreshore – creates a "service / alienating" streetscape
- Commercial buildings on Honeysuckle Drive- recently completed have no interface with the street. These are the type of buildings that destroy the character of the street as they have no interaction with the Public Domain at any time of the day.
- Market Town Big W extension – not sure if this is State of Locally approved but the huge black elevations that run along the service streets have completely destroyed any amenity in these streets. We need to have strategies that will not allow such bad design to be implemented.