

urbanrenewal - Submission for Newcastle Renewal

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To: <urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au>
Date: 3/17/2013 10:04 PM
Subject: Submission for Newcastle Renewal

To those it may concern,

My name is Kye Weedon & I'm a citizen of Newcastle.

Having grown up in Lake Macquarie, I've watched the city evolve from the BHP era to what is now (in my opinion) one of the most unique & desirable locations in Australia, which is why I decided to settle here. I'm excited by the potential for this city. I'm sure I don't need to convince anyone who's spent some time here of what a fantastic canvas we have. I love the changes already made along the harbour, & I can imagine it's just a taste of what to look forward to. As a citizen & end-user of these changes, they can't come too soon!

I am very mindful of the future. The plans & designs laid today will have huge & continuing effects on the city & it's people. Not only will future generations be walking on the pathways we lay, but the entire culture & attitude of the city will be defined within the context of the built environment. This places a huge responsibility on all parties to ensure that the physical & cultural characteristics of the city are not compromised for any short term convenience or oversight. Let me be more specific...

I use a wheelchair for mobility, thus accessibility of public spaces is an issue for me. More than that, the accessibility of the environment defines in a very explicit way the community involvement I can enjoy. For example: Darby Street, for all it's draw, is a place I can not enjoy because of the lack of wheelchair access both on the street & in the buildings. Conversely, Honeysuckle is almost brilliant for access, & there I spend as much time as I can. Of course, I don't propose that an easy fix is available for every problem, but in the case of these new plans, we have a very unique & meaningful opportunity.

By virtue of geography, Newcastle city (the areas which are the subject of these plans) lends itself to being inherently wheelchair accessible. While the BCA holds standards for accessibility, the reality is that its application is not consistent, & even where applied exactly it is still not a guarantee of *good* accessibility. True equal inclusion requires more than boxes to be ticked. Truly accessible & inclusive spaces require mindful & purposeful design - it is not enough to assume the BCA certification will best encapsulate all access needs.

I could write a thousand pages explaining as many examples of good & bad design, but I think it would be easier to suggest than an expert on such be included in the planning process. Again, I don't simply mean an expert on BCA compliance, I mean also an expert on inclusive design who is driven to exceed standards & meet the true needs of end users. At present, given the complete lack of mention of accessibility for people with disabilities in the 6 volume planning documents (!?), it seems this aspect has not been given any special attention. Please, for the sake of those whose lives will be hugely affected, & for the sake of the social attitude of the city, help make Newcastle an example of inclusion by making this a foundational priority.

Obviously I have a vested interest in the accessibility of Newcastle, but I encourage you to look beyond just my request & look at the positive effects of good design. Perhaps the biggest benefit we could bring to the city is to create a space free of barriers (& here I'm not talking specifically about

physical access, although it is an integral ingredient).

I imagine a space where it is not an unusual sight to see a man & his service dog enjoying time out in a cafe. A space where bicyclist & handcyclists share the same road. A space where wheelchair users can access the same entrance as everyone else, genuinely free of barriers. To create such a space fosters a social attitude of inclusion, maybe even celebration of diversity! Kids will grow up in a city where disability is not taboo & moved out of sight, it is instead a core part of the social value & the very buildings foster that recognition of equality. At the very least, without providing such access we hinder the social advancement of an otherwise wonderful city.

Newcastle has an exciting future - let's begin by building equality into the very foundations.

Sincerely,
Kye Weedon

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