

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

The West End Advisory Group

The West End Advisory Group is a large group of business people and residents convened by The Newcastle Business Improvement Association – Newcastle Now on fortnightly basis in the West End of Newcastle.

Our group is drawn from Business Owners & Operators, Property Owners & Residents & Employees spending significant proportions of their time and or having business and property investments in the West End of Newcastle.

We are an otherwise diverse group drawn from a wide variety of professions and life callings unified by our involvement in and passion for the West End of Newcastle.

We welcome the initiative shown by the NSW Government in undertaking this planning exercise and the broad suite of measures foreseen within this plan.

Our interests and concerns find their main focus is the West End but necessarily include the whole of the City of Newcastle.

Our submission reflects the views expressed by our group and discussions held within a series of workshops we have undertaken with support and advice from Newcastle Now and planning staff of Newcastle City Council since the release of the [Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012](#).

Our Response

We support the Urban Renewal Strategy 2012 and the implementation of a detailed and well-coordinated plan for the development and future of Newcastle.

We particularly support the following ideas proposed in the Strategy:

- An integrated approach based upon extensive technical work in economics, transport, heritage and the public domain
- An approach based upon proven ingredients of successful city making
- Reinstating Hunter Street as the main street in Newcastle
- A focus on place based initiatives
- Adaptive re-use and preservation of heritage buildings
- Improved public transport
- Laneway revitalisation and extension
- A greater mix of residential types
- Establishment of Newcastle's CBD in the West End
- Encouragement of the night-time economy and further 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
- A Permeable city with easy access and use
- Landscaping, greening, gardens and community growing areas.
- Priority to cyclists and pedestrians including a dedicated system of cycle ways
- Footpath widening
- Car Sharing

Our concerns relate to the need for:

- Greater ambition for future proofing, energy efficiency, environmental and social sustainability and food security.
- A greater focus on preserving the diversity, human scale, heritage values and the eclectic nature of our built environment as large-scale development is encouraged.
- The need for a staged approach that pays careful regard to inherent values and already developing improvements in the social connectivity and built environment of our city and the West End.
- Greater recognition and appreciation of the premium value uses and revitalising energies already present within the West End .
- Implementation of the Railway Terminus and Transport Interchange away from Wickham
- Insufficient regard for the role and wide range of benefits to be derived from support to creative industries and passionate and innovative entrepreneurs already present in the West.
- Less dependence upon retailing in thinking about the renewal of our city
- Further time for a full and meaningful consultation process to be completed

We provide more detailed comments on specific sections of the [Urban Renewal Strategy](#) in the table below.

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

• P A G E	SECTION	TITLE	COMMENT
xviii	Vision	Guiding Principles	<p>There is no mention of Sustainability as a Guiding Principal.</p> <p>Central to our Vision is a view of Newcastle City as an exemplar city for Energy Efficiency, Greening, and development principles supporting Environmental and Social Sustainability.</p> <p>Absent from the Vision Statement, these principles seem to have been treated in a cursory fashion throughout the rest of the document.</p> <p>Energy Efficiency, Sustainability and Food Security need to be prioritised within the strategy with detailed implementation plans and outcomes.</p> <p>We note that Section 3.15 explains the framework for Sustainability within which this document sits.</p> <p>Our concern is that the lack of Vision and ambition in the document then becomes particularly evident in the graphic representation of the future of our city, setting in train a cycle of low expectation.</p> <p>Where are the representations of innovative built forms, the green walls, roof top gardens let alone cutting edge new technologies (such as CH2 in Melbourne)?</p> <p>In this respect this strategy seems dated in its vision for our future.</p>
14	1.3	City Centre Vision	<p>We note the 2006 City Centre Vision, included as a key direction <i>"Ensuring human-scale development at the pedestrian level."</i></p> <p>With lot amalgamation and large floor plates in the Core Commercial Zone in the West End, achieving this outcome will require specific measures and intent.</p>

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

20	1.4	Planning Framework	<p>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.</p> <p>The West End has a diversity and eclectic character that risks being over shadowed or greatly diminished by the bulk and scale of buildings brought on by these height and FSR incentives.</p> <p>At street level buildings of this scale risk having little relationship to the street, making Place Making initiatives (to enliven the Public Domain), difficult or of marginal value. Large Commercial buildings in the Honeysuckle area have ground floor elevations that disengage to the street. Care needs to be taken not to repeat these mistakes.</p> <p>We accept and agree with some large scale Commercial buildings in Newcastle West but seek further initiatives within the Strategy to preserve the existing character of the zone and overcome this commonly seen failure of large Commercial Buildings.</p> <p>We note the Strategy calls for <i>Active frontages for Commercial Development</i> and would like</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>We support these and underline the need for follow through in their implementation. We seek the addition of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific incentives and protections for heritage buildings • Greater recognition within the Strategy of the premium value of distinctiveness and uniqueness
			<p>Another proposed Key Control for the City's Commercial Core and the West End is a clause;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Requiring that development in the commercial core zone has at least one street frontage of 20m or more.</i> <p>In combination with generous heights and FSRs this would seem to risk amalgamation ahead of economic demand, stalling inherent renewal, destroying heritage values and reducing diversity.</p> <p>We request this aspect of the strategy be rethought in favour of a more merit based approach.</p>

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

62	4.2	Guiding Principles	<p>Energy Efficiency, Ecological and Social Sustainability and Food based Innovations should be highlighted here as a driving Principle behind the City's development.</p> <p>This cannot just be about Greening streets and buildings but genuinely innovative, forms, systems and technologies. Incentives need to be implemented to encourage excellence in this area.</p>
78	4.3.1	Flexibility between activity nodes	<p>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 a Street Activation Plan needs to be implemented to achieve passive activity along the street.</p> <p>One suggestion is a requirement that each business elevation have a minimal percentage of openness to the street, adding liveliness to both sides of the window!</p>
82	4.3.2	Public Domain	<p>The Image at the bottom of page 82 fails to describe how cars, cyclists and pedestrians share the space. It is an uninspiring image of "upgrade" in terms of activation of a Public area. There is no public activity, public art, discernable improvement in amenity. If this document seeks to define future good development it needs to show higher quality thought and set a higher bar for innovative approaches.</p>
86	4.3.3	Public Domain	<p>We support the Bosquet Option. The planting of less but larger shade trees will provide a more flexible, usable Public space. We find the amount of attention (8 pages) given to this one issue disproportional.</p>

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

94	4.3.4	Position the west end as the city's future CBD	<p>We view the description of the West End zone is simplistic. While, <i>"Housing showroom and bulky goods, retail, car dealerships and self-storage."</i></p> <p>This ignores the diversity of uses and businesses in The West End. In particular it ignores the clever and from an economic development point of view high value existing uses.</p> <p>This ignores the trend already developing within the West end for displacement of these uses and replacement with cleverer, broadly , innovative uses.</p> <p>While by defining the development/renewal project in the West End in terms of a transformation of a bulky goods area to a large scale Commercial Core might act to simplify the task it works against realisation of a high value outcome.</p> <p>The West End is the site of Newcastle's first small (Terrace) bar, Espresso bars like Bank Corner and The Social, Sculpture and Art Galleries like those at 2 – 6 Beresfield Street. The West End is the start up location of Newcastle's first Creative Hub –The Roost Creative, premium eateries s & The Sourdough Baker Café, supports Music Shops, premium eateries such as SUBO, Vintage & Fashion Stores as well as Fashion and Musical instrument manufacture.</p> <p>The extent to which "Maker" culture with its links to graphic design, web – design, photography and screen based arts and media businesses are establishing themselves In the West End goes unrecognised within this document.</p> <p>To this extent we are concerned that the vibrant, edgy, sustainable renewal taking place and its contribution to the inherent diversity and layered values of The West End goes unrecognised within the Strategy.</p> <p>We Agree 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" or Docklands / Honeysuckle style development.</p>
94	4.3.4	Vision about opportunities for precinct – Railway Interchange	<p>The new transport interchange at Wickham is supported.</p> <p>Since the announcement of this decision however there have been reports of the interchange going to Broadmeadow. We do not support Broadmeadow or Hamilton as a location for the Rail Terminus and Transport Inter-change.</p> <p>While we appreciate the Governments attempt to settle this issue, if the Terminus and interchange can not be realised at or very near Wickham we believe the decision to terminate the rail needs to be reviewed.</p>
96	4.3.4	Cottage Creek	<p>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.</p>

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

98	4.3.4	Birdwood Park	<p>We agree there is a great opportunity for an up grade of Birdwood Park to enhance the Public Domain within the West End. The graphic representation of this upgrade presented in the Strategy document seems dated and uninteresting. The representations and the result should represent excellence and innovation in the built form.</p> <p>The elevations shown suggest the Ground floor tenancies will have very little activation and create, in reality, quite an alienating street elevation. It looks like many past mistakes are to be replayed. The scale and massing of this elevation would fail to facilitate surveillance of the park or offer interactive activities for the users of the park.</p> <p>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.</p>
102	4.3.6	Supporting the City's Heritage	<p>The 5 Case Studies presented by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects are great examples and would be wonderful additions to any city.</p> <p>We support more heritage buildings being supported in their repurposing and restoration rather than demolition. We are that consolidation strategies within the plan will lead to more significant buildings falling into disrepair being unviable to develop.</p> <p>We would prefer to see the Adaptive Reuse approach as a primary approach within the strategy.</p>
116	4.4.3	Bulky Goods retailing	<p>Most Bulky Goods Stores are situated where pedestrian activity is not a priority. They typically create Streetscapes which are alienating and difficult to activate. We see "Maker" stores and creative and clever businesses growing to displace these with increasing rents.</p> <p>A preferable focus for the future CBD of Newcastle is more residential or Artist Workshops and offices of clever and creative industries</p>
138	5.1.1	Zoning	<p>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, we 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 past mistakes as seen in other cities.</p> <p>A "living city" requires a range of 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 smaller but similar percentage of Residential floorspace?</p>

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

184	5.3.8	The Store	<p>The Old Co-op Store is a Newcastle icon. The image on page 185 is not clear in its representation of the potential heights of the surrounding buildings.</p> <p>On page 186, two new buildings are shown on the Store site between Hunter Street and the Railway Corridor. This is not properly represented in this section of the document.</p> <p>The laneway between the 90m high building and the Store appears to only service the buildings. 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.</p>
198	5.7	Active Frontages	<p>Within the new Commercial Core Zone, the amount of "Blank Walls" any street elevation should be limited (especially at the street level). Typically, Commercial buildings have opaque glass to most elevations and an empty disengaging entry foyer with zero activity and activation.</p> <p>The suggestion of tactile materials and architectural treatments is fine to some degree but it will not work over huge expanses of Street elevations.</p>
202	6.1	Implementation	<p>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 or a reasonable development path.</p> <p>A transparent effective planning process is needed to give a variety of development investment decisions an improved degree of certainty. Incentives need to be provided to smaller scale projects to continue.</p>

Response to Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

DATE 13.03.2013

Conclusion

Our review of this Strategy plan and other literature highlights the crucial importance of further work in the area of sustainability and innovation in the built environment in Newcastle and the West End.

We are crucially concerned that an effective balance is found in this Strategy between supporting existing renewal in Newcastle and the West End and achieving greater intensification and a new CBD for Newcastle. We wish to ensure that measures designed to achieve an intensification do not rob the West End in particular of its valuable uniqueness, heritage buildings, diversity of use and activity and interesting layers.

The work and intellectual property of Renew Newcastle is noted. The potential to extend this model within the West End as the basis for cost effective economic development needs to be carefully examined.

We note Newcastle has the highest number of Artists Per Capita compared any other city in Australia and a highly participatory creative culture. As a city of Artists and creative expression and the home of Renew, we are concerned the potential economic development contribution of Creative Enterprises may not be adequately recognised within the Strategy.

We include as an appendix 1 a paper presented at a recent Renew Australia "Making Spaces" Conference highlighting the cost effective manner in which creative and knowledge culture can drive economic development and renewal in the West End and Newcastle.

We are concerned that to too great an extent the land of our city is being treated as a commodity instead as a venue for the creation of social and economic interaction and the building of social and economic amenity.

We would welcome further opportunity to contribute input into the development and implementation of this Strategy especially as it relates to the West End of Newcastle.