

26 April 2013

Manager, Centres and Urban Renewal
Department of Planning & Infrastructure
GPO BOX 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy*. The Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) believes that an integrated approach to planning for our buildings, infrastructure, transport networks and communities is essential if Newcastle is to maintain and improve its productivity, liveability and sustainability well into the future.

The GBCA commends the Department of Planning & Infrastructure's commitment to revitalising the Newcastle city centre. As part of a considered planning approach, it will be important to integrate the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy* with the planned update to the *Lower Hunter Regional Strategy* along with relevant land use and transport planning initiatives and use this integrated approach to inform state budget priorities. We believe that an holistic approach and application of 'joined-up thinking' is essential in order to achieve the best outcomes whether for a building, community, city, region or state. Please note that the GBCA also provided a submission to the *Newcastle: Future City* local planning strategy in November 2012.

The exhibited strategy identifies nine guiding principles that seek to grow and reinvigorate the Newcastle city centre in order to strengthen its position as the capital of the Hunter region. The strategy envisions that through urban renewal, the Newcastle city centre will become a more desirable place to live, work and visit by providing a vibrant, engaging and accessible urban environment. These principles provide a positive direction for the strategy, but the ultimate success of the strategy will be determined by how well the reform is implemented over the next two decades.

Government has a responsibility to provide visionary leadership, in particular by setting contemporary benchmarks and rigorous standards. The GBCA believes it is vital that sustainability principles are considered during the earliest stages of planning in order to achieve the best long-term outcomes for communities. The GBCA recommends that this strategy and all of its future iterations consider sustainability benchmarks that can provide a useful method of measurement and support best-practice outcomes within the built environment.

The work that the GBCA has done in collaboration with government and industry to build a rating tool for sustainable communities (detailed later in this submission) can provide the framework within which better-planned and better-designed communities can be delivered and progress measured, based on holistic principles and best-practice benchmarks.

About the GBCA

The GBCA is Australia's authority on green buildings and communities, established in 2002 to develop a sustainable property industry in Australia and drive the adoption of green building practices. The GBCA promotes green building programs, technologies, design practices and processes, and operates Australia's only national voluntary comprehensive sustainability rating system for buildings and communities - Green Star.

The GBCA has more than 750 member organisations, including government departments, which work together to support the Council and its activities. The GBCA is also a founding member of the World Green Building Council (WorldGBC), which was established to provide a federated 'union' of national green building councils with a common goal to support the sustainable transformation of the global property industry; there are now 96 such councils worldwide.

Green Star rating tools

Green Star is a voluntary tool that encourages, recognises and rewards best practice and innovation. The first Green Star rating tool was released in 2003 in response to market demand for a rating tool that would evaluate the environmental design and construction of buildings as well as establishing a common language for green buildings.

There are currently nine Green Star rating tools which address a range of building types and over 560 projects have achieved Green Star certification across Australia, with a further 500 projects registered.

The Green Star rating system is designed to take an holistic approach within each class and building sector, addressing nine categories in total: Management, Indoor Environment Quality (IEQ), Energy, Transport, Water, Materials, Land Use and Ecology, Emissions and Innovation.

With over 560 projects delivered and certified, Green Star has a proven track record when it comes to implementation of efficient, healthy and productive green buildings.

Some certified and registered Green Star projects within Newcastle and the Hunter region include:

- NIB Health Funds Head Office, Newcastle
- GHD Newcastle (Office Fitout), Newcastle
- Kurri Kurri TAFE – Hunter Valley Hotel, Loxford
- Westrac Administration Building, Tomago.

Green Star – Communities

In 2009, the GBCA commenced work, in consultation with industry and all levels of government, on the development of a rating tool for sustainable development projects on a community scale; examining issues of economic, social and environmental importance. The Hunter Development Corporation and UrbanGrowth NSW (formerly Landcom) have been key supporters of the Green Star – Communities rating tool and are both sponsors of the rating tool along with all government land organisations and sponsors from local government, the Australian Government and industry.

The first step in developing the Green Star – Communities rating tool was to develop a national framework consisting of five best practice principles, plus Innovation:

- Enhance liveability
- Create opportunities for economic prosperity
- Foster environmental responsibility
- Embrace design excellence
- Demonstrate visionary leadership and strong governance.

Stage 2 of the project involved establishing best practice benchmarks and metrics for assessing and certifying sustainable communities. A set of 38 credits was then developed and tested on a number of projects across Australia. The Green Star – Communities PILOT rating tool was launched in June 2012 and we have accepted expressions of interest from a number of projects interested in taking part in the pilot phase. A copy of the Green Star – Communities National Framework and a guide to the credits can be found on the GBCA website: <http://www.gbca.org.au/green-star/green-star-communities/>

The GBCA believes that Green Star – Communities can assist the Department of Planning & Infrastructure achieve its vision for the Newcastle city centre urban renewal strategy in two key ways.

Firstly, the Department of Planning & Infrastructure can reference Green Star – Communities in its planning protocols and encourage use of the rating tool for development projects throughout the rest of the state. Referencing Green Star – Communities can help to enable 'joined-up' thinking and align the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy* with the *Lower Hunter Regional Strategy* as well as infrastructure and transport strategies at federal and local level by providing a common language and a set of best practice benchmarks.

A number of local governments and state agencies are already realising the potential of the Green Star – Communities rating tool to assist them with planning in their local area. The Hunter Development Corporation has demonstrated remarkable commitment to Green Star – Communities as a sponsor and contributor.

It is vital that the NSW Government capitalises on the investment of knowledge and resources made by state agencies such as the Hunter Development Corporation and UrbanGrowth NSW and takes the opportunity to integrate the outcomes of the rating tool development process into document such as the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy* and other planning documents.

Secondly, the Green Star – Communities Framework and the credits within the rating tool can be used to help set targets and assist in measuring outcomes. The strategy notes that the City of Newcastle has an established framework to address sustainability and the natural environment through established local planning documents.

The GBCA recognises the value of these sustainability objectives and initiatives, but without establishing measurable benchmarks and applying a method of measurement, it is not clear how these objectives will be realised. The Green Star – Communities framework, with its five overarching principles, can assist in setting practical, high-level planning direction, while the credits in the rating tool provide guidance and measurable best practice benchmarks. The credits have been developed with extensive industry and government collaboration and tested on a number of projects.

The guiding principles outlined in the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy* are quite closely aligned with the five overarching principles of Green Star – Communities. Several examples of how the credits can be used to provide guidance and benchmarks are detailed below:

Opportunities to grow and expand and a busy and vibrant city centre

The purpose of the *Design* category within the Green Star – Communities rating tool is to encourage sustainable urbanism through best practice planning and design practices. It seeks to create places for people by encouraging ‘smart’ growth which is compact, connected and people-focused and, where possible, located on previously developed land. The Green Star – Communities *Des-2 Site and Context Analysis* credit encourages comprehensive analysis of the geographic context and characteristics of the site at different levels during the planning and design phase. This category also recognises projects that undertake site planning processes designed to facilitate sustainable urbanism.

Economic viability with enhanced choice and competition

The Green Star – Communities rating tool recognises that affordability encompasses a range of factors. As such, it rewards projects that integrate mass transit options - so that people aren’t stuck in their cars for hours each day. It rewards connections to employment and education facilities - so that people may work and learn locally. And it rewards access to local amenities – so that people have a vibrant, liveable and ultimately affordable community at their doorsteps.

In one example, the *Econ-3 Return on Investment* credit encourages an holistic cost-benefit analysis that addresses indirect and intangible costs and benefits to the developer and community to ensure long term productivity, health and social and environmental issues are captured as well as core costs and benefits.

Housing mix and affordability

The Green Star – Communities rating tool encourages an integrated approach to providing housing that also takes into account a range of issues such as access to amenities, access to education and employment opportunities, and energy efficiency. Housing affordability strategies recognised under the *Econ-5 Affordability* credit include:

- Providing a range of lot sizes to support housing diversity, and a mix of densities with increased density near activity centres;

- Providing a proportion of housing lots and dwellings to the market at an affordable price purchase price for low- to moderate-income households;
- Provision of key worker housing;
- Provision of a program for guaranteeing the supply of shared equity and/or social housing within the development; and
- Establishing partnerships between organisations to ensure allocation and delivery of affordable housing stock.

Investment, employment and business growth and providing for future employment growth

The economic resilience of a community can be achieved through creating diverse employment opportunities that meet the needs and demands of local and regional communities and facilitating access to them. The *Econ-1 Employment and Economic Resilience* credit requires a project to demonstrate that it is likely to have a net gain on existing employment opportunities in the local area.

Transport, access and connectivity

Cities and communities are economic hubs of activity and opportunity. Connectivity between the Newcastle city centre and its surrounding areas is important for the flow of information, ideas, goods and services. and access to public transport within walking distance is essential.

The *Env-11 Transport* credit requires an Integrated Transport Plan (ITP) to be developed for each project which sets out how various forms of transport will be integrated with land use. An ITP should encourage sustainable transport outcomes, particularly the existing and future public transport network and planning and provisions for active transport.

There are a number of other considerations captured under Green Star – Communities that will contribute to more efficient provision of transport. As well as smart planning and design of precincts and communities, demand-side factors can help to ease pressure on transport networks at peak times and contribute to greater efficiencies. All of the Green Star rating tools aim to highlight the relationships between our built environment and transport solutions.

The *Econ-7 Digital Economy* credit encourages developments to deliver infrastructure that will enable efficient remote working facilities, best practice enterprise connectivity and the highest standards of wireless connectivity. These sorts of technologies will assist Newcastle to start on a long-term shift towards more flexible working arrangements, which also has a positive effect upon traffic congestion.

There are also a number of other important considerations raised in the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy* to which credits from the Green Star – Communities can apply:

Social infrastructure

Green Star – Communities includes credits such as *Liv-3 Healthy and Active Living*, *Liv-5 Safe Places* and *Liv-7 Accessibility and Adaptability* which provide a range of benchmarks for equitable access. The GBCA recognises that there are many factors that need to be considered if equitable access to a great lifestyle can be achieved for everyone in our community. The Green Star – Communities rating tool can further support this aim through a

number of the credits previously outlined which focus on affordability and improving access to transport as well as economic and education opportunities.

Resilience to flooding and other extreme weather events

Australia is increasingly exposed to extreme weather events and natural disasters. In particular, flooding is a significant risk for Newcastle and the surrounding region. It is important that we do all we can to protect and restore our natural environment as well as ensuring that our built environment is more adaptable to a changing climate and more resilient to natural hazards. The *Gov-6 Adaptation and Resilience* credit specifies the development of a Climate Adaptation Plan and a Community Resilience Plan to identify threats and facilitate faster recovery, when or if disaster strikes.

Stakeholder engagement

Effective engagement is necessary for the development of a vision that is shared by stakeholders across the community, industry, and government. To progress successfully towards such a vision, a project must build community capacity, assess performance, and encourage ownership and leadership in the realisation of goals and objectives. The *Gov-4 Engagement* credit rewards projects that can demonstrate the preparation, implementation and ongoing review of a stakeholder engagement strategy. Projects are further rewarded when evidence can be provided that a project's vision has been developed through engagement with the community.

Strong leadership is essential if we are to tackle challenges such as economic growth, health and productivity, sustainable population growth, climate change, affordable housing and infrastructure planning. Governments must consider whole-of-community and whole-of-city approaches to planning to provide people with greater access to information, resources, and employment and learning opportunities as well as delivering better outcomes for the environment.

The GBCA welcomes the opportunity to work more closely with the Department of Planning & Infrastructure to discuss how Green Star – Communities can help to inform the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy* and contribute to better outcomes for the Newcastle community. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or Daniel Hartin, the GBCA's Advocacy Manager – State, via email at daniel.hartin@gbca.org.au or by phone on 02 8239 6200, should you require any further information or to arrange further consultation.

Yours sincerely,



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