



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NEWCASTLE**  
AUSTRALIA

22 April 2013

Mr Sam Haddad  
Director General  
NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure  
GPO Box 39 Sydney NSW 2001

information etc.

2/5.

Dear Mr Haddad,

**RE: Submission to the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012**

The University of Newcastle is pleased to make a brief submission in response to the NSW Government's recently released "Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012" (NURS). It is requested that the matters raised in this submission be considered for incorporation into NURS and be used to further inform the future planning and revitalisation of Newcastle.

The University of Newcastle (UoN) commends the NSW Government for taking a strong leadership role in their approach to addressing the constraints and challenges facing Newcastle. The NURS lays a genuine foundation for delivering a co-ordinated and effective planning framework for Newcastle. This clear leadership position also provides an important opportunity for the NSW Government to establish itself as the national leader in supporting the higher education sector and the broader knowledge economy as a fundamental economic pillar in an area that clearly needs to diversify its economic base.

**University of Newcastle City Campus**

The expansion of the UoN City campus is integrally linked to UoN's strategic vision to deliver world class performance that builds strong, sustainable regional communities through business, education, skills and innovation. The UoN is therefore pleased that NURS explicitly supports the University's vision of expanding their presence in the city and creating an educational hub in the Civic precinct.

The NURS identifies a University led revival of the city centre as a key economic initiative of the strategy for revitalising Newcastle. Importantly, the NURS clearly acknowledges the significant economic and social benefits that will be delivered "as a result of relocating some of the University of Newcastle faculties to the city". The UoN supports this position, noting that the UoN City campus will act as a short term catalyst for successful urban renewal, while also providing a long term driver for the establishment of synergies between business and creation of new industries.

Consequently, the NURS has provided the NSW State Government with a once in a decade opportunity to demonstrate, in a meaningful way, a progressive approach to strengthening and diversifying the Newcastle's economic base by facilitating the sustainable development of the UoN City Campus. Section 4.4.2 of the NURS makes specifically refers to the development of Australian Technology Park (ATP) in Redfern (Sydney) as a prime example of the "transformative power of educational institutions being used to recycle dilapidated buildings and to drive renewal". In response, the UoN noted that since the opening of ATP in 1996, the Park has received significant funding, in addition to political and legislative support from the NSW State Government.

Given the importance of the UoN relocation to the success of revitalising Newcastle, the UoN would therefore welcome a similar level of ongoing support from the NSW Government as provided in the ATP example. In particular, the UoN would welcome financial support to address matters such as mine subsidence, which substantially contributes to the cost of development and ultimately results in a reduced capacity to accommodate a critical mass of students onsite.

Further to the above, the New South Wales Vice-Chancellor Committee Submission to the Green Paper *"A New Planning System for NSW"* observes that a number of concessions and incentives that are aimed at encouraging the establishment of essential infrastructure should be extended to Universities. Items of relevance to the UoN City campus project promoted in NURS are the following:

- a) Expanding the categories of exempt and complying development to include common development that is ancillary to an Educational Establishment;
- b) Amending the provisions within State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007 that relate to Educational Establishments, ensuring they apply equally to works not undertaken by Public Authorities;
- c) Providing relief from the burden of development contributions.

As to the latter point, the UoN strongly supports the inclusion of a University-led revival of the city centre as a key economic initiative of NURS. It is understood that the Section 94A Contributions Plan 2009 prepared by Newcastle City Council currently provides an exemption from the Section 94A for education/educational establishments (including universities). Given the significant economic and social contributions that the UoN will deliver, it is considered appropriate and significantly justifiable that the proposed City campus continue to be exempt from all future development contributions.

### **Urban Design and Transport**

The NURS identifies the Civic precinct as the location for delivery of an educational, civic and cultural hub. The UoN is generally supportive of the Civic precinct intent as it is considered to deliver several locational advantages, including wider community access, notable transport links and significant opportunities to leverage off existing UoN and city assets, services and amenities.

The UoN also supports the proposed urban design measures aimed at improving public recreational areas such as Wheeler place, in addition to the proposed pedestrian connections to Honeysuckle. The enhancement of recreational opportunities represents a critical element in the delivery of a successful City campus and should be prioritised accordingly to ensure a vibrant and active sense of civic space is delivered in the short term for both existing and future students, staff and residents.

More generally, the UoN is supportive of the proposed development standards for building height, floor space and lot configuration. The proposed controls appear contextually appropriate and should deliver suitable built form outcomes.

We note that the specific car parking rates for an Educational Establishment in the city centre have not been established as part of the proposed amendments to the Newcastle Development Control





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Plan 2012 identified by the NURS. Currently, the DCP prescribes a rate of 1 space per 60m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor area for non-residential development in the city centre, which is considered excessive for a city university campus. The UoN supports the principal of reducing the current rate for non-residential development and would therefore welcome the opportunity to work with the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure to ensure that the proposed car parking rates clearly reflect the nature of the land use and the dominant user groups, while also supporting the UoN environmental initiatives of delivering a smaller carbon footprint.

Notwithstanding the above support, the lack of a comprehensive plan for the future use of the rail corridor represents a significant gap in the place making strategies championed in the NURS. The UoN is critically aware of the need to ensure comprehensive planning of the rail corridor is undertaken prior to the completion of the planning framework. Without a plan, the rail corridor has potential to become a haven for anti-social behaviour and a blight on the urban landscape, which ultimately may act as physiological barrier capable of undermining the intended benefits of linking the city to the waterfront.

Given the above, the UoN encourages the NSW Government to release an updated strategy that addresses alternative uses of the rail corridor. In this regard, the UoN is supportive of alternative travel modes such as light rail, which is capable of leveraging off the existing rail infrastructure. We note that the Queensland Government and the Gold Coast City Council established a development fund 10 years prior to the construction of the 'Gold LinQ' light rail project, thereby ensuring sufficient local funds were available at a time when patronage levels reached a suitable threshold. We encourage a similar level of foresight be applied at a local government level in this instance.

More generally, it needs to be acknowledged that travel between the City Campus and the Callaghan campus will be required post the establishment of the City Campus. Public transport will play a key role in the movement of students and staff between campuses. While the proposed Wickham interchange will provide an appropriate transition point, the additional cost and time associated with changing transport modes is likely to act as a deterrent to public transport use, particularly for students who are typically a more price sensitive user group. As such, the UoN seeks a commitment from the NSW State Government to extend the Strategic Bus Corridor initiative identified by Section 4.5.1 by providing a direct bus service between the proposed city Campus and the Callaghan Campus. The direct route will not only reduce time and costs but it will also reflect the significant economic benefits that stand to be gained from leveraging a University-led renewal of the City centre.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the NURS is a rare opportunity to address all the constraints and challenges facing Newcastle in a co-ordinated and effective manner. We hope that this opportunity will not be missed and urge the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure to meaningfully engage with the University of Newcastle prior to the finalisation of the Urban Renewal Strategy and proposed amendments to the planning controls in the Newcastle LEP and DCP.

We would therefore welcome the opportunity to meet with the Department separately to discuss matters of particular relevance to the University of Newcastle, its various campuses and surrounding communities.



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We trust that you will consider this submission when preparing the required amendments to the draft Strategy. Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Regards,



**Peter Eaton,**  
Acting Director, Facilities Management.