

14 March 2013

Urban Renewal Team
Department of Planning & Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001
Transmission by email: urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir or Madam,

SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO EXHIBITION OF *DRAFT NEWCASTLE URBAN
RENEWAL STRATEGY 2012* IN RESPECT OF THE SACRED HEART CATHEDRAL
PRECINCT, NEWCASTLE WEST

We act for the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, the owner of the major portion of the Sacred Heart Cathedral Precinct (the *Precinct*), bounded by Hunter, Tudor, Parry and Selma Streets, Newcastle West. In response to the *Draft Newcastle Urban Strategy 2012* (the *Draft Strategy*), this submission outlines our urban design and planning analysis of the *Precinct* in the context of the *Draft Strategy* and proposes changes to the FSR and maximum building height controls currently contained in the *Draft Strategy*. The following commentary explains our urban design approach to the Precinct, as illustrated in the accompanying drawing.

Newcastle's Sacred Heart Cathedral occupies a site at the western gateway to the city centre. The Diocese and Parish occupy approximately two thirds of the Precinct, a large city block within Newcastle West. The remainder of the Precinct is partly privately owned, and partly Council owned. It lies at the junction of two state routes and a National Highway (The Pacific Highway).

Under the *Draft Strategy*, the existing low-scale, largely commercial area of Newcastle West is planned for a dramatic transformation, with the city blocks adjacent to the Sacred Heart Precinct proposed to permit buildings of up to 20 storeys in height.

Having regard to the *Draft Strategy*, the urban design vision presented in our accompanying drawing for the Sacred Heart Precinct illustrates the opportunity to create an impressive setting for the Cathedral and add value to the wider community.

The Cathedral is the jewel on the site, and it is the Diocese's aspiration to create a setting which speaks of its importance within the City of Newcastle. From a design point of view, we imagine simple elegantly designed urban and landscape spaces. These will support the range of services that take place within the Cathedral and the Precinct. The spaces could be simple and grand. A range of environments could include a large urban public piazza for gathering; formal gardens for reflection; colonnades and landscaped walks to stroll; and amphitheatres for outdoor events. These spaces will connect with the existing landscaped columbarium and pathways which already exist as part of the Cathedral's setting. They will also have the opportunity to connect with a proposed new function area and cafe. In this regard it is noted that the Parish has recently received development consent for the demolition of the dilapidated former Better Brakes building along the Tudor Street frontage of the site.

The wider site, extending to the block edges, holds great opportunities for developing the site at a holistic level. We have explored an approach to the development which takes in the wider Precinct area.

Our study extends development beyond current limits of the *Draft Strategy*. The aim is to facilitate a grand gesture of a large open space within the vicinity of the Cathedral and create a City- owned landscaped piazza and garden.

This development concept has the benefit of concentrating development towards the north-western end of the site, leaving the site to the south of the Cathedral undeveloped. The creation of a large and high quality public space is very important in the context of the planned high-rise environment of this area. It is also an appropriately ennobling setting for the Cathedral. With no development proposed within close proximity of the Cathedral, the setting of the Cathedral is thereby maximised to its full potential. Development to the north could be phased.

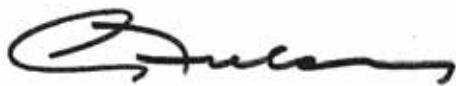
The realisation of the Sacred Heart Cathedral open space proposal is dependent upon achieving a higher FSR and maximum building height for the Precinct than is currently proposed under the *Draft Strategy*. The *Draft Strategy* proposes to zone the Precinct B4 Mixed Use and applies an FSR of 1.5:1 and a maximum building height of 18 metres. These

development standards are in marked contrast to the 6:1 FSR and 60 metre maximum building height being applied to the immediately adjacent B4 zoned city blocks to the north-east and south east of the Precinct (i.e. the city blocks bounded by (1) Hunter Street, Railway Street and the railway line, and (2) Hunter, Tudor, Parry and Denison Streets).

The Sacred Heart Precinct exhibits similar locational advantages to the 2 adjacent city blocks referred to above, being located at the junction of 2 important city centre traffic arteries (Hunter and Tudor Streets); being located on existing public transport routes along Hunter and Tudor Streets; being within 400metres walking distance of Wickham train station; and comprising the Newcastle city centre's acknowledged western gateway. Accordingly, it is submitted that the development standards that should be applied to the Precinct are those proposed to be applied to the immediately adjacent city blocks referred to above. Our urban design study of the Precinct also supports this approach, as shown in the accompanying drawing. Acceptance of these development standards will facilitate the Diocese's aspirations for the Precinct as shown in our concept drawing.

The Catholic Diocese's vision for the Sacred Heart Precinct can become the most significant development and public open space outcomes arising from the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy*. We therefore consider it important for the Diocese and ourselves to meet with the Department's Urban Renewal Team for a briefing on our study of the Precinct and a discussion of the Diocese's proposals. I would be grateful if a member of the Team could contact me to arrange this.

Yours sincerely,



GARRY FIELDING
REGIONAL DIRECTOR
CITY PLAN STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT PTY LIMITED