

I am pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission and thank Hon. Scot MacDonald MLC for his timely reminder to respond to the Department of Planning and Environment's Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City. I wish to address specifically planning for Newcastle Art Gallery.

It is reassuring to see several mentions of the arts in this document.

In his Foreword, Mr MacDonald boasts that "Newcastle offers a vibrant inner urban lifestyle complemented by a dynamic arts, music and university community".

In the Introduction, the document acknowledges that "Facilities such as the Hunter Stadium and Newcastle Entertainment Centre underpin a growing diversity in sport, recreation, the arts and culture, attracting State-level and national events".

The Regional Goals are highlighted but expressed in generalities. Regional goal 1 includes the statement "Hunter City will offer a high standard of living with infrastructure and services". And regional goal 4 promises that "Access to jobs, services, shops, recreation opportunities, entertainment and the arts will deliver quality living".

Yet when it comes to Action Plan 2.1.1 "Civic – focused around Wheeler Place; offers government, cultural and educational hubs, including City Hall and Newcastle Museum, as well as the new Newcastle Courthouse complex and new University of Newcastle campus;" there is no mention of the Newcastle Art Gallery. I find this puzzling.

Envisaging Newcastle as a growing regional city – Hunter City – without an appropriate expansion of the Newcastle Art Gallery is, frankly, an impossibility. Planners must be aware that the current Gallery is unable to attract "State-level and national" exhibitions because of the limitations of space and security in the existing building. The Gallery will need to be in a position to offer a range of exhibitions, including displaying its own nationally significant collection and hosting visiting exhibitions of an appropriate standard if Regional Goal 4 is to carry any weight.

Plans for a proposed major redevelopment have previously been taken to an advanced level. The Newcastle Mines Grouting Fund could and should provide for the Art Gallery site as part of the revitalisation of the Civic precinct and to enable the Art Gallery redevelopment to proceed in a timely and cost-effective way. I consider that as an act of faith in the future of the Hunter, and as part of a policy that acknowledges the importance of the arts in delivering "quality living" that the NSW Government should urgently consider funding an expanded and enhanced Art Gallery.