

NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL

SUBMISSION TO THE NSW PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

This submission relies heavily on the key issues identified during consultations undertaken in the development of Newcastle City Council's Community Plan 2006 - 2010 (Community Plan) and focus groups facilitated by the Loft Youth Venue.

1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT - NEWCASTLE

The intent of the Community Plan is to provide a strategic overview of the key community trends and issues that the Newcastle community and Newcastle City Council will need to address to maximise the opportunities of being a sustainable city that people enjoy living in, and will want to live in. It also provides a framework for addressing these issues over a five year period. The Community Plan will primarily provide guidance to the community, community groups and organisations and the following areas of Council:

- Recreational Services and Planning
- Library and Cultural Services and Planning
- Human Services and Social Planning ¹

Newcastle differs from some of the key trends identified in the Inquiry's Issues Paper No 1² in the following areas:

- There is decreasing school retention rates in both Newcastle and the Central Coast. A trend which the Department of Education is researching.
- Newcastle has a higher and increasing rate of single parent families.
- There is increased mobility of families moving between suburbs and moving in and out of the city.
- The population will grow due to people moving to Newcastle

Other relevant Newcastle trends for this enquiry include:

- Newcastle will continue to have a relatively high proportion of people on Centrelink payments.
- The total working age population is expected to increase.
- Our population will continue to age with the majority still "active".
- Households will become smaller
- The average income will increase though it will remain lower than the state average.
- There will be growing disparity between the "haves" and "have nots".

¹ Community Plan 2006 2010 The City of Newcastle

² Committee for Children and Young People's Inquiry Issues paper No1 p 5

The above key social and economic trends have been identified from the Background Papers for the Community Plan and provide additional background information. They are available at: www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/go/communityplan.

The Community Plan has also highlighted the following local issues:

- Social isolation related to mobility issues.
- Affordability - looking at planning mechanisms to encourage affordable inner city housing as families are forced to the outer suburbs and the CBD is the place of first choice for young people. Transport then becomes difficult for many young people to access the beach, social, recreational and cultural activities.
- The capacity of public transport to keep pace with population growth and urban sprawl.
- The importance of affordable family recreational opportunities for instance an area with no commercial operators e.g. kiosks and coffee carts.
- Changing local demands for recreational, cultural and community service types and service levels will have an impact on the role of Council (and other service providers) in providing and managing facilities.

2. INITIATIVES THAT WE HAVE IN PLACE NOW

Young people are the greatest users of public space. When designing facilities young people should be consulted and heard. There can be intolerance between generations and all stakeholders should be involved in decision making. Unfortunately the voice of young people is heard but can get lost in competing interests. An example of this is when Council was designing a new local park, it was identified that young people needed a skate park and a dirt bike track based on previous consultations involving young people and the broader community. However, facilities were not provided due to concerns presented by local residents. Council is required to make decisions for the 'whole community'. How can we effectively engage youth when they are often disappointed with the outcomes?

The following initiatives have been undertaken by Council in relation to Young People and the Built Environment

Youth Venue

Newcastle City Council has refurbished a century old building in the heart of the Newcastle CBD as Council's Youth venue. The LOFT comprises 3 purpose-renovated youth spaces:

- Music/sound room
- Art room
- Small gig workshop space

In addition the Venue has a meeting room, public access computer room and office. Located in the heart of the Hunter Street Mall, the Loft provides a range of structured youth arts activities as well as a drop-in function.

Skate parks

NCC has a number of suburban skate parks as well as a larger facility at South Newcastle Beach.

Discussions with the skateboard community indicate that their requirements are for a large centrally located regional facility

South Newcastle Beach Aerosol Art Agreement

The South Newcastle Beach area had been used as a quasi-legal graffiti wall since the early 1990s. From the beginning the wall operated on an ad hoc basis with a distinct lack of a management process for the use of the wall. As a result and over a period of time, the wall fell into a state of neglect and disrepair. Concerns over this disrepair and neglect led to the development of the South Newcastle Beach Aerosol Art Agreement. The agreement seeks to re-introduce a management process to the area by involving all of the stakeholders including the aerosol art community.

The agreement sets out rules for use, designated areas for freeform, senior artists and community murals and establishes a reference Group comprised of all stakeholders to oversee ongoing management of the agreement.

Korowa – Waves of the Sea

Korowa was an Aboriginal Youth Arts project to provide opportunities for Aboriginal young people to work with professional artists and community elders to create artworks at Newcastle Beach. The project was developed partly in response to problems experienced by Aboriginal young people at Newcastle Beach. The young people learnt of the Aboriginal heritage associated with the area while, at the same time, being able to interact with the Newcastle Beach community: lifeguards, surfers etc. A major component of the project was the participation in surf safety classes conducted by Surf Life Saving NSW.

The artworks created by the project reflect a contemporary interpretation of traditional themes and motifs located at Newcastle Baths. The effect is to highlight to the wider community the Aboriginal heritage of the area and to provide Aboriginal young people with a sense of ownership of the area.

3. CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Consultations for Council's draft Recreation Plan have identified the need to have a good, usable, multi-shared, centrally located public space, within existing and new residential areas. It is not sufficient to just provide the space. There is also a need to facilitate activities on public space. Parents have an expectation that there should be organised activities provided so that children are supervised at all times. Whose responsibility is it, to cover costs of providing these activities which may exclude some children due to affordability reasons?

Formal and informal recreation - some adults have expressed a preference for formal recreation activities for young people rather than just "hanging out" this view can influence the allocation of funding. Often there is a lot of political pressure to fund 'organised activities / programs' that keep young people occupied and supervised. Would these resources be better spent on good urban design to let young people "do their own thing"?³

³ Draft Recreation Plan Newcastle City Council 2005

It is suggested that Issues Paper No 1 does not link affordability - people moving further out and the need for better transport and affordable housing while acknowledging the importance of public transport to young people and a view (held by many) of young people as consumers (which is good) or non-consumers (which is bad).

The issues paper places much emphasis on improvement to urban design practices and consultation processes as a solution. From a local government perspective, urban design is guided by Development Control Plans (DCPs) & the development industry. However as guidelines DCP's are open to interpretation by consent authorities and developers, and can be an expensive process if challenged. To enhance the likelihood of a DCP being implemented, there needs to be a high level of community and developer agreement. Urban design is influenced by market trends and commercial considerations, such as the current trend for large residential properties with smaller outdoor space and more indoor recreation space e.g. cinema rooms which may reflect parents concerns regarding open space. Should State and Federal Governments market the merits of other types of housing?

There has also been a move from local and free entertainment to large professionally produced, user pay entertainment for young people.

The trend towards quasi privatisation of public space in Newcastle with owners of adjoining properties to public space, having significant influence over what activities can take place.

The Inquiry Issues Paper No 1 proposes strategies such as "traffic calming". Council's experience is that it is an expensive option and requires police surveillance to be effective. Alternative options such as cycle ways, footpaths and good design of shared public space linked to shared thoroughfares could provide better outcomes for children and young people and encourage increased physical activity. Walking School Bus models may also be a more effective means of utilising limited funds.

The Newcastle Development control Plan 2005 could be improved with the approval of Council and the community for example:

- 60 percent maximum of a site for a dwelling would complement existing environmental initiatives.
- Medium/high density developments be required to provide a percentage of ground floor space as a communal play area for residents.

Strategies such as these would encourage architects and developers to consider the needs of children in design at the concept stage.

4. CONCLUSION

There needs to be a clear direction set by the NSW government in relation to urban outcomes including housing, transport, infrastructure & open space. Numerous tools may need to be employed to implement the direction of government. Council is undertaking a number of innovative initiatives to encourage children and young people to utilise public space. The key areas that an enquiry may be able to provide

assistance is how the interest of young people and children can be accommodated within a 'whole of community' context that open areas like Council have to work within and the provision of affordable housing.

Newcastle has a regional role which is re-enforced through the Department of Planning's Lower Hunter Regional Strategy which places a financial burden on Newcastle City Council over neighbouring local government areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission, we look forward to hearing of the Inquiry's outcomes.

Valerie Woodman
Manager Human Services

Therese Postma
Social Planner

Barney Langford
The Loft Youth Venue
Co-ordinator

Belinda Smith
Senior Urban Planer