

RESPONSE TO THE PLANNING INQUIRY

Tim Owen

Submission no 50:

Mr Prior states:

“The final stage of the RNH site (Stage 1C) is being developed by Newcastle developer, Mr Keith Stronach. Mr Stronach was reported to have admitted to the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) that he contributed donations to election campaign of previous Member for Newcastle, Mr Tim Owen. He was also reported to have admitted that he prevailed upon Mr Owen (as Member for Newcastle) to gain access to the then NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure (Department) regarding his proposed development for Stage 1C of the RNH site – and this was (in part) the purpose of his donation to Mr Owen’s campaign.

RESPONSE:

As the local member, I have absolutely no influence at all in any planning decision with respect to the city. The idea the Mr Stronach donated to my campaign in order to gain access and approvals for any development is just mischief and false conjecture.

It is always the job of a local member to facilitate meetings where possible between local constituents and any relevant NSW government agencies (whether you’re a member of the general public, an issues group, or in fact a developer). This occurred consistently during my time as the Member for Newcastle on a regular basis, no matter who the person or organisation was or what issues they had and referred to ministerial offices as part of the job as a local member.

Since 2009 (before I was even elected) and the release of the Newcastle City Centre Renewal report, the pace and design of development within Newcastle has not veered from the initiatives outlined in that report. I might add that the report was commissioned by the previous member for the Hunter (Jodi McKay), accepted by her and the previous Labor government in NSW and included the rail truncation at Wickham, establishing a new city campus, providing a new justice facility and importantly, embarking on improvements and investment in the city overall and including the public domain. The idea that this is some form of Liberal party/Developer conspiracy does not stand up to any scrutiny whatsoever.

Submission no 56:

RESPONSE:

This development has been a GPT/Urban Growth proposal that has been considered closely by the NSW Department of Planning and the Minister. This initiative has been driven by the two agencies charged with the redevelopment of the East End of the city of Newcastle. As the local member, I consulted with all local groups (both for and against the East End re-development) and then provided that advice (from each interest group) to the respective agencies for the consideration as part of the planning process. That is my job as a local member. With regard to the frequency and number of periods of consultation, they are determined by the agencies involved and those agencies need to be consulted in respect to their decision-making in that context.

The Urban Renewal of the city of Newcastle and the East End redevelopment have been long overdue and are supported by the vast majority of Novocastrians. There will always be interest groups with differing views (and that is healthy), but on balance, the government is delivering what the majority of people in the city have asked for over decades and very consistent with the 2009 report.

The decision making process with respect to the SEPP, spot re-zoning and the NURS will need to be taken up with the respective planning agencies, as it is their responsibility solely.

Submission no 103:

RESPONSE:

As per submission 56 above.

Submission no 119:

RESPONSE:

In brief: Evidence is available in a number of letters written by myself to the Minister for the Arts in support of the gallery redevelopment. The assertion from Mr. Henderson is ludicrous at best, that this stopped when McCloy was elected.

There was never a funded commitment by the NSW government for the redevelopment, though I thought it a great project and fought hard for the money continually. If I remember correctly, I was advised by the Arts Minister (by letter) before McCloy was elected that the funding would not be forthcoming at this time, despite my strong advocacy.

When Mr McCloy was elected Lord Mayor, he investigated closely the costing of the redevelopment. He advised (as did the GM of NCC) that the costings significantly exceeded the amount articulated by Mr Henderson, the Art Gallery Foundation and others. These details (I am sure) are available from the NCC staff and management.

As far as I can recall, after many meetings at a local level between all parties and after personal consideration by the Premier of NSW, the NCC undertook to provide the NSW Government with detailed costings once an approved Art gallery redevelopment by the NCC was agreed and to come back to the Government for consideration for a future budget. The Art Gallery is an NCC asset, not a state government asset and accordingly the NSW Premier at the time requested that the NCC come back to government once agreement within council had been reached on the way forward.

Submission No 147:

RESPONSE:

As per submission 119 above.

Submission No 174:

RESPONSE:

As per submission 119 above

Submission No 180:

RESPONSE:

As per submission 119 above

Submission No 181:

RESPONSE:

As per submission 56 above

Submission No189:

RESPONSE:

As stated above, since 2009 (before I was even elected) and the release of the Newcastle City Centre Renewal report, the pace and design of development within Newcastle has not veered from the initiatives outlined in that report. I might add that the report was commissioned by the previous member for the Hunter (Jodi McKay), accepted by her and the previous Labor government in NSW and included the rail truncation at Wickham, establishing a new city campus, providing a new justice facility and importantly, embarking on improvements and investment in the city overall and including the public domain.

The truncation of the heavy rail line, the redevelopment of the East end and some form of renewal strategy for the city of Newcastle, were also the previous Labor member for Newcastle's (Ms Jodi McKay) key plans for the city. She in fact initiated the key study to look at this issue. It is therefore ludicrous to postulate that this has come about because of a cosy relationship between local developers and the government.

This government has been able to put into effect a broad set of strategies based on the 2009 report.

Submission No 251

RESPONSE:

Please refer to previous answers to submissions above

Submission No 329

RESPONSE:

This submission by SOR is factually incorrect in a number of areas. As I have stated previously in this document, since 2009 (before I was even elected) and the release of the Newcastle City Centre Renewal report, the pace and design of development within Newcastle has not veered from the initiatives outlined in that report. I might add that the report was commissioned by the previous Minister for the Hunter (Jodi McKay), accepted by her and the previous Labor government in NSW and included the rail truncation at Wickham, establishing a new city campus, providing a new justice facility and importantly, embarking on improvements and investment in the city overall, including the public domain. The idea that this is some form of Liberal party/Developer conspiracy does not stand up to any scrutiny whatsoever.

Points made, such as corporate members of the PCA were rewarded by myself for their financial and in kind support, is completely false. There is no evidence at all to prove this. SOR also suggest I was part of a broad ongoing conspiracy to take control and develop the Newcastle rail line? This is again a misleading statement and please refer to my response to Submission 56 above.

My role as the local member was to ensure that the broad milestones and timelines for the implementation of the 2009 Newcastle City Centre Renewal report were put strongly to the current government. The reports and studies released by the current government in 2012 (the Newcastle urban renewal Strategy, the partnering between Urban Growth NSW and GPT), the decision to replace the heavy rail with light rail from Wickham in 2013, the building of the city Justice precinct and establishment of the inner city campus for Newcastle University are all consistent with the plans for the city since 2009.

I would like to also emphasise that all decisions about development and changes in the city of Newcastle were Cabinet decisions and I had no bearing or influence whatsoever on those processes and decisions. All are made on merit and exhaustive studies. Just because particular groups have a different opinion, does not mean that the other is view is wrong.