

Submission  
No 356

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE  
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 24/10/2014

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Partially Confidential

Date 24 October, 2014

PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE AND THE BROADER HUNTER  
REGION (INQUIRY)  
Legislative Council  
NSW Parliament  
6 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**RE: BIASED PLANNING PROCESS FAVOURING GPT/URBANGROWTH  
NSW HIGH RISE DEVELOPMENT FOR NEWCASTLE'S HERITAGE CITY  
CENTRE – DA2014/323 AND TRUNCATION OF THE HEAVY RAIL LINE**

To Whom it May Concern,

I wish to raise concerns with the NSW Legislative Council (or Upper House)  
Inquiry into *Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region*.

Specifically with reference to probity, a lack of transparency, inadequate  
community consultation, perceived conflict of interests and excessive  
developer influence on planning decisions surrounding the spot rezoning of  
Newcastle's Mall and East End heritage area to facilitate the development  
application **Newcastle East End DA2014/323**.

In addition, I am very concerned about whose interests are being served in  
the proposed and ill-thought out "plan" to truncate the heavy rail line with no  
clear promise, plan, strategy or budget in place to retain the town's public  
transport corridor for the purposes of public transport. Certainly not my  
interests, as a person whose prognosis for mobility and ability to drive in  
coming years is not good.

These matters are especially concerning given their proximity to those  
recently investigated by the Independent Commission Against Corruption  
(ICAC) during 'Operation Spicer', regarding illegal developer donations at the  
state government level, specifically relating to Newcastle.

While I support urban renewal in Newcastle I am alarmed at the proposal  
submitted by joint developers GPT Group / UrbanGrowth NSW, for high rise  
apartment towers in the low rise heritage precinct of inner city Newcastle.  
This development triples height limits to 20 storeys and significantly increases

floor space ratios. The development site is bounded by Hunter, Perkins, King and Newcomen Streets, Newcastle.

The proposed development runs contrary to the guiding principles of the adopted Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy (NURS-2012) in which high-rise towers were to be located at Wickham, or Newcastle West End, not in the heritage East End. How this excessive and inappropriate development plan came to be produced and submitted when the existing strategic planning documents specifically ruled out high rise in Newcastle's East End heritage precinct requires investigation.

The GPT/UrbanGrowth NSW high rise plan could only proceed with changes made to the Newcastle Local Environment Plan (LEP-2012), through significant amendments to the State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP-2014) that specifically favoured two developers – GPT/UrbanGrowth NSW. Those amendments were recently approved through ministerial spot rezoning, on 25 July 2014. The reasons for the SEPP amendments being approved have not been adequately explained and should be investigated.

The east end of Newcastle IS CURRENTLY undergoing renewal. Already. There is a significant number of people now living in, and visiting the east end, and it is difficult to find adequate parking often. Including after hours on Friday, and weekends. It's important we retain the qualities of this area that attract people to our beautiful, pleasant, vibrant city centre. It is important we retain good public transport access to the city centre – from Sydney and the hunter valley.

I am concerned about the lack of transparency, and the role of local and state government agencies and officers in changing planning controls.

I am concerned that some critical decisions have not been based on factual evidence, including recent revelations that not all expert advice commissioned by The City of Newcastle has been provided to Councillors nor the public.

I am concerned that there may have been inappropriate influence by developers on decision makers, and / or conflicts of interest that need to be investigated, specifically:

The concerted campaign by developers to buy up the west end of Newcastle, let the buildings rot, then put the pressure on local and state politicians for political favours to advance their own interests. It's shameful and deceitful practice that causes us great concern that this is what our State Government offers as a transparent planning process. Because we care about our cities future and want it to grow without losing its values and appeal.

**I respectfully urge the Upper House Committee to please consider making the following recommendations:**

1. Revoke the SEPP amendment by providing a revised SEPP amendment overriding the 2014 approval.

2. With respect to building heights, restore the NURS (2012) that includes:

- acceptable height limits (maximum 24 metres or roughly 8 storeys)
- appropriate floor-space density provisions
- maintains iconic public vistas to and from the city, and
- facilitates high rise development in the West End rather than the heritage precinct.

3. Place an immediate moratorium on all development associated with the amended parts of the Newcastle LEP.

4. Review the truncation of the heavy rail line and make sure that the public transport corridor remains public land, for the sole purposes of public transport.

**In conclusion**, I trust this information may assist the Parliamentary Inquiry into *Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region* and hope the Inquiry will consider my concerns regarding the controversial GPT/UrbanGrowth NSW development proposal - DA2014/323 - for high rise towers in Newcastle's heritage city centre.

I hope the information provided will assist the Inquiry to better understand how poor planning decisions, that will burden Newcastle's future, were made.

This information is confidential and intended for the *Planning Process In Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region* (Upper House Inquiry).

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,