

**Submission
No 171**

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

Organisation: The National Trust of Australia (NSW)
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23 October, 2014

The Director
Select Committee on the Planning Process in
Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Inquiry on the planning process in Newcastle and the broader Hunter region

Dear Sir/Madam,

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region.

In September, 2014 the Board of the National Trust agreed that the Trust should call on its members and the community to support the Trust's position on the Newcastle CBD by contacting Newcastle City Council and the NSW Government with its concerns. This Position Paper was based on a Policy on the Historic Newcastle Central Business District adopted by the Trust Board in July, 2014.

Both the Policy and Position Paper were based on a long history of National Trust action to recognise and lobby for the conservation of the heritage of the historic Newcastle Central Business District.

In October 1978 the Newcastle Urban Conservation Area was listed on the National Trust Register and in April 1981 the nearby Cooks Hill Urban Conservation Area was listed on the Trust Register.

A total of 234 individual places in Newcastle have been listed on the National Trust Register since 1969.

The Trust's listings have facilitated the listing of 38 places in Newcastle on the State Heritage Register and 185 places listed on the Schedule of Items of Environmental Heritage of the Newcastle Local Environmental Plan 2012. Also, four Heritage Conservation Areas and three Archaeological Sites have been listed as Heritage Items on the Local Environmental Plan.

Following the 28 December, 1989 Newcastle earthquake the National Trust was concerned that there would be pressures to demolish damaged historic buildings which, in the Trust's view could be repaired and conserved. Following investigations 39 properties were listed on the Trust Register in February 1990. Of these, eight were subsequently demolished.

Newcastle is unique among Australian cities, in having a hill profile with the town gathered around it; an urban landscape which sweeps up from the harbour to The Hill, Cathedral and King Edward Park.

Newcastle represents the archetypal cathedral port city type, with the Cathedral constructed on the highest point in the city, visible from all other parts of the settlement.

The Trust's Hunter Regional Branch has worked for over three decades to have Newcastle's heritage recognised and conserved.

Major threats now face historic Newcastle with a proposed mall development of a height that would impact negatively on the 180 degrees view arc from the cathedral northwards and on Heritage and Urban Conservation Areas and individual buildings of heritage significance. There is also the threat to remove the historic heavy rail line to Newcastle Railway Station, in the heart of the historic CBD. Such a proposal would be unheard of in any other major city.

The Policy on the Historic Newcastle Central Business District adopted by the National Trust Board on 30 July, 2014 is set out as following:-

Policy

1. The National Trust will oppose the removal of the historic heavy rail line from Newcastle to Wickham.
2. The National Trust will oppose major redevelopment in the historic CBD which would be of a height and density which threatens historic sight-lines (particularly the 180 degrees view arc from the Cathedral northwards), which is damaging to the heritage values of the listed Urban and Heritage Conservation Areas and which would threaten heritage-listed buildings.
3. The Trust will urge that State Significant Development must not switch off Heritage & Environment Protection Legislation nor allow major new developments to be dealt with as modifications to existing approvals in the Newcastle historic CBD.
4. As the NSW Government is both the part owner and determining authority for the GPT/UrbanGrowth development proposal, the Trust will urge that any Development Application be dealt with independently by the Planning Assessment Commission following a full and open public inquiry.
5. The National Trust will oppose "spot rezoning" as a mechanism for facilitating major re- development in Newcastle.
6. Following the demolition of the "Empire Palais Royale" and the construction of a KFC outlet on a site of great Aboriginal archaeological significance, the National Trust will urge that full archaeological investigations precede any development proposal assessment and that important archaeology be protected and presented to the public as has occurred at other locations such as Parramatta or in Sydney's The Rocks. Earlier archaeological studies can form the basis for these further investigations.
7. The Trust will urge that the low, human scale character of the area east of Auckland Street, which respects the topography of the Hill area and Christ Church Cathedral at its apex, must be protected.

8. In view of the high number of heritage-listed buildings already demolished in Newcastle (17) the Trust will strongly oppose any further demolition or unsympathetic development of heritage-listed and heritage contributory buildings.

9. The Trust will support the Renew Newcastle Project, initiated by Marcus Westbury.

10. The Trust will urge the preparation of Conservation Management Plans for sites with high significance including James Fletcher Hospital, and Newcastle Court sites, the Victoria Theatre and the Newcastle Post Office.

11. The Trust will urge that key Newcastle public parks and open spaces such as Nobbys Headland and King Edward Park receive full heritage recognition and are managed and maintained for the benefit of the general public and not alienated for commercial or private use.

On behalf of its members and the community the National Trust urges that an immediate moratorium be placed on major developments proceeding in the Newcastle historic Central Business District and that closure of the Newcastle Rail Line not occur pending the proper consideration by government at all levels of the findings of the Legislative Council Select Committee.

Yours faithfully,

Brian Scarsbrick
Chief Executive Officer AM

Graham Quint
Director - Advocacy