

Submission  
No 88

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 20/10/2014

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Partially Confidential

Date 20.9.14

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**

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 perceived conflicts 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**.

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.

I am concerned about the lack of transparency, and the role of GPT local and state government agencies and Council members in bringing about the changes to the LEPP planning controls.

My specific concerns that I hope the inquiry will investigate are:

1. I am concerned that the influence of GPT on Newcastle Council and State Government has been disproportionate and that GPT has for over a decade

been “landbanking”, letting the CBD properties go to ruin, at the expense of the town, businesses and community. Their developments in other parts of Newcastle benefitted from this demise. Their stranglehold on the CBD has been a disincentive to other more constructive developers and they engineered a position to blackmail the government and Council

Our government has recently purchased a substantial amount of GPT property. My question for the enquiry is Why have no other options or developers /developments been considered for this site?

2. I question the necessity to change existing planning laws to legitimize the proposed towers and the reasons behind the massive government expenditure to develop them. Public information suggests private industry is already poised to provide enough accommodation to meet the needs of the population growth Minister Goward’s says we are to expect.

The article “City rejuvenation spurs property boom” (Herald 4/7/14) listed 16 developments approved for CBD Newcastle alone. Just 14 of these will 1247 apartments while the size of two “remains to be determined” One of these was the GPT/Urban Growth tower. The university is also developing. The council website has also published in the last two years building approvals for many thousands of dual occupancy, shop top housing and smaller developments in Newcastle based on a population of 170.000

Alternative developers could profit from development of the site while respecting Newcastle previous planning laws. None were asked. Newcastle could have population and economic growth without sacrificing it unique heritage heartland, its beautiful skyline and tourism potential.

3. I am also concerned by the way the ex Mayor McCloy has used the media inappropriately to win support for changes to the LEPP. Mr McCloy is quoted in the Newcastle Herald Sun newspaper as saying that the Bishop of Newcastle supported the GPT/Urban growth towers. This article and the official response of the Bishop released the next day is attached. The Bishop’s statements in the Sydney Morning Herald article by Elizabeth Farelly is also attached which make it clear the bishop has been deliberately misquoted.

The iconic Newcastle Cathedral will be diminished severely by the proposed towers. It was a strategic falsehood designed to preempt and disqualify any public discourse about this.

Also attached is a copy of an article published in the Newcastle Star newspaper. This was written by ex Mayor McCloy in the regular mayorial column. Mr McCloy uses this article to enjoin the public to write “a letter of support for these guideline changes (LEPP) to be approved to the Department of Planning.” He goes on to

list all the contact details for the Department. This is a radical departure from the normal content of this column and an improper use of influence.

3. I am also concerned by the presence of Cr Robinson as an alternate NCC member of the Hunter JRPP. ICAC evidence has proven that Ex mayor McCloy paid for Mr. Robinsons "how to vote cards". This is clearly a potential conflict of interest.

**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.

**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,

Name

# Bishop confirms his high-rise aspiration

By JASON GORDON

HIS iconic cathedral has often been at the centre of Newcastle's high-rise debate, but the city's Anglican bishop has become a surprise backer of the latest urban renewal plan.

Newcastle lord mayor Jeff McCloy turned heads on Tuesday night when he told a Newcastle council meeting that he had met Bishop Greg Thompson who told him that he supported the controversial high-rise plans for the city centre being spearheaded by UrbanGrowth and GPT.

The support came despite growing debate over the extent to which high-rise buildings would block few corridors to and from the Illip Christ Church Cathedral.

On Wednesday, the Anglican bishop confirmed that he had



GREG THOMPSON

met the lord mayor last week.

He said the meeting was "purely by a meet-and-greet of two civic leaders", and that he had said he was not opposed to high-rise development.

"I welcome urban renewal to

the city of Newcastle, however it needs to involve the following: good business, goodwill, good vision," Bishop Thompson said in a statement to the *Newcastle Herald*.

The statement also said that "Bishop Greg believes a city is more than its property prices, and he looks forward to working closely with the lord mayor and the City of Newcastle to focus on social justice for those on the margins of the city".

Cr McCloy said he had been impressed with the newly elected Anglican bishop.

"I absolutely loved the discussion I had with him," Cr McCloy said.

"I found him very down-to-earth, a real knockabout. I think he will bring great things to this city."

"We talked about a lot of things, and while he is very new to this city, I know he is already very passionate about doing good things in our community."

Bishop Thompson is not the first religious figure to enter the often-polarising debate about the city's renewal.

In April last year, the Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Diocese publicly backed the state government's plan to terminate the city's heavy rail line at Wickham.

In a submission written by the diocese's strategic assets and development manager Boyd McCallum, the government was urged to push ahead with the planned rail and city revitalisation changes, saying that the "vocal minority" had held Newcastle back.

Friday, N

**NEWCASTLE MATTERS**



**JEFF MCCLOY**  
Newcastle City Council Lord Mayor  
all council matters: [newcastle.nsw.gov.au](mailto:newcastle.nsw.gov.au)

## Stand up and support Newcastle's future

Newcastle is at a critical point in its transformation ... a fork in the road. The people who want change so Newcastle can be a truly world-class city now need to be heard.

We must support the bold, yet achievable, Urban Renewal Strategy or allow a small but vocal pocket of opposition to try to hijack plans that promise investment, opportunity and prosperity.

It is gratifying the NSW Government is now focussed on Newcastle renewal.

For too long, the City didn't have its fair share of government spending. Now, we must do our part to take advantage of the attention and resources.

Now is the time for businesses, organisations and private citizens to create a groundswell for change in Newcastle.

The City needs the support of the "silent majority" for changes to Newcastle's urban planning guidelines that deal with two major developments: The University of Newcastle City campus and increases in floor space ratio; and the GPT Group and UrbanGrowth NSW in the East End, with increased height levels to kick-start redevelopment while protecting significant city views.

I urge you to write a letter of support for these guidelines changes to be approved to NSW Department of Planning, by email to [urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au) or by fax to (02) 9228 6555. Do it now!

Give a clear message of what we want for our City's future to the NSW Government!

**Give**  
a clear message of what we want for our City's future