

**Submission
No 353**

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

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Johanna Trainor

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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 would like 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 the lack of integrity and 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**.

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.

I support sensitive urban renewal in Newcastle, However, I am alarmed at the proposal submitted by joint developers GPT Group / Urban Growth NSW, for high rise apartment towers in the low rise historical district 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.

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

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

- The process by which the decision to spot rezone in the historic precinct of Newcastle was made?
- Who was involved in the decision making process? Not the people of Newcastle as the City's LEP has completely ignored.
- Who benefits from this development?
- What interests or benefits will GPT property gain in truncation of the rail at Wickham station?

I am concerned that some critical decisions have not been based on factual evidence, including:

- The proposal is to built multi story apartment blocks in the inner-city thereby increasing the population density of the city whilst at the same time removing the main form of public transport – the rail line. This is illogical when considering the global trend is to build more rail lines to deal with traffic congestion and encourage the use of public transport rather than private vehicles for travel.
- The new university campus with potentially 5,000 students & staff accessing the site each day has planned for only 4 car parking places. Not coincidentally the Campus is placed directly across the road from Civic railway station. Where is the research that supports the notion that staff & students will not drive cars into the city and will travel by bicycle or opt to catch several forms of public transport in order to reach the Campus.
- The new courthouse is also being built across the road from the Civic rail station with only 20 car parking spaces allocated. Presumably when both of these projects were planned, with minimal car spaces, their positioning next to a rail station (many students travel from the outer reaches of the Hunter and central Coast) would have been a significant reason why these plans were proposed and accepted. Was the decision to truncate the rail line at Wickham decided before these projects were realized?
- Where is the evidence that a detailed transportation plan has been developed for future regional growth? Has it considered and resolved the issue of population growth in the region, increased use of private vehicles and intensive traffic congestion in the city due to lack of public transport?

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 decision by a Government department (Urban Growth) to built high rise apartment blocks in the historic precinct of Newcastle overriding the Local Council LEP guidelines in partnership with the private property group GPT.
- The people of Newcastle have been kept in the dark about what will happen along the rail corridor once the rail line has been truncated at Wickham station. It is one of the few stretches of land in Newcastle that has not been undermined and therefore the land could be used to build extremely high-rise buildings. Who benefits from this decision and what is planned for this strip of land?

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. Call an immediate halt to the planned truncation of the rail line on 26 December, until the Upper House has finalized their inquiry into the Planning Process In Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region.

In conclusion, I trust this information may assist the Parliamentary Inquiry into *Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region* and hope the Committee 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 Committee 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,

Johanna Trainor