

Submission
No 358

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 24/10/2014

Partially Confidential

Name
Street address
Suburb.....Postcode

Date

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 – DA2014/32**

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**.

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

The undue influence of, and apparent government subsidisation in diverse ways, of GPT.

I have included an article from the Newcastle Herald July 14 2012 which states that GPT paid \$100 million for its CBD landholdings before it walked away from a proposed \$600 million development project on that land blaming the then Labour govt for not committing to removing the heavy rail between Newcastle and Wickham.

Three years later in 2012 the govt paid only \$20 million for two thirds of the \$100 million dollar GPT purchase (following GPTs alleged lack of success in selling its holdings.) During this time the town was stagnant and no alternative developments possible.

The \$100 million paid by GPT initially seems to have been excessive and would appear to have been based on the "expectation" of govt planning and infrastructure changes in its favour. Were promises made? Why and by whom? Why is it necessary to subsidise GPT's flawed and failed business plan?

The article goes on to quote a GPT spokesman as saying "the decisions for Newcastle's optimum urban renewal still rely on a state govt decision on fundamental infrastructure changes in the CBD" (railway truncation)

In return GPT for this 20mill Govt investment GPT would provide "expertise" "attract third party capital" "but would not contribute any capital to the redevelopment." Mr Owen Liberal is quoted as saying "we said we would get GPT back to the table and we have" Gpt and its ideas falsely appears to be the only option.

Why have others who don't require land who might offer more sustainable options not canvassed?

The current 2014 proposed GPT /Urban growth project subsidises GPT profitability through a half billion dollar investment in residential towers complex, gives back access to the land, on top of the truncation of the railway.

The Government is already spending enough tax payers money; nearly 2 billion as "revitalization boost" on the new court house and university campus.

They are bringing many overseas students, to "revitalize the city all, of whom will value a rail system.

Many other developments are under way and will continue without GPT towers or the truncation of the railway. The limited land in the Newcastle CBD peninsula has a 19th century road system which cannot expand, nor afford to lose its main streets to trams.

This could be seen as a particular international company and local interest group using their power and connections in a long term game plan to achieve their ends regardless of the loss to the city, people and existing businesses. 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 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 only for the *Planning Process In Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region* (Upper House Inquiry).

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Tel:

Email:

