Development plans and environmental conservation finalised for Huntlee

A new planning regime for the Huntlee New Town site near Branxton has been formally adopted with increased environmental protection, monetary contributions for ongoing conservation and the capacity for up to 7,500 new dwellings.

A State significant site (SSS) listing and voluntary planning agreement (VPA) for the 1,700 hectare Lower Hunter site were publicly exhibited in September-October and have now been approved by Minister for Planning, Tony Kelly.

The SSS listing enables the site to be rezoned to facilitate its planned urban development for up to:

- 7,500 new dwellings;
- 200 hectares of employment and mixed use lands which will create more than 3,000 jobs; and
- 5,612 hectares of conservation lands to be protected in perpetuity.

The VPA complements the rezoning by establishing a legal mechanism for the transfer of the conservation offset lands and other commitments by the developer.

Of the land to be protected for environmental conservation, 624 hectares is within the Huntlee site – including a 17-hectare ‘park’ for the protection of the *Persoonia pauciflora*, a critically endangered plant species – with the remaining 4,988 throughout the region.

Under the terms of the VPA, the proponent will also contribute $1 million for the ongoing management of the conservation offset lands and $100,000 for research into and protection of the *Persoonia pauciflora*.

**Following public exhibition of the plans, a 173-hectare parcel of land at North Rothbury that was previously earmarked for rural purposes, will now be zoned for environmental management in recognition of its significant ecological values.**

A minimum lot size of 40 hectares has also been established on this site, which contains remnant Central Hunter Ironbark-Spotted Gum-Grey Box forest – an endangered ecological community.

In addition to the site's new environmental management zoning, this development control will deliver greater restriction on subdivision and a far higher conservation outcome than its current designation as rural land.

Minister Kelly said the development of the site will take place progressively over the next 25 years.

"It will create a major new centre for the region with capacity for around 20,000 people who can live and work within the region, and will go a long way towards achieving the long-term housing targets outlined in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy," the Minister said.

"The approval does not allow for actual construction to take place, with future development applications needing to be lodged and approved before this can happen."