

Friday, 1 March 2013

New conservation and housing land west of Newcastle

About 1,500 hectares of bushland will be permanently protected and 3,000 new dwellings supported as part of a major new Lower Hunter planning decision.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure today announced a significant rezoning approval for Coal & Allied land, west of Newcastle.

The plan supports the Lower Hunter's growing housing needs and helps deliver a vision of a green corridor from Watagan Ranges to Port Stephens, outlined in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy.

Acting Director-General Richard Pearson said the decision would support the settlement of Minmi through up to 3,300 new dwellings of low or medium density and a new neighbourhood centre containing up to 8,000 sqm of commercial and retail space.

"It ensures also that about 1,500 hectares of high value conservation land will become state conservation area for the enjoyment of future generations and the protection of native animals and plants that inhabit the area," Mr Pearson said.

"This is an outcome that delivers on our strategic aims of boosting housing supply with integrated infrastructure and protecting the natural environment."

The approval clears the way for a decision on a concept plan currently lodged with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

This concept plan provides more detail about the proposed new urban area around Minmi, including setting aside space for new and expanded primary schools, recreation areas and new police and ambulance stations.

The new residents in this area will be close to the intersection of the Sydney-Newcastle Freeway and Hunter Expressway.

The rezoning also:

- Secures habitat for Swift Parrots, Squirrel Gliders and other native birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles.
- Secures habitat for threatened plant species Black-eyed Susan, Lesser Creeping Fern, Magenta Lilly Pilly and others.
- Protects endangered ecological communities in the Lower Hunter including Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest, Hunter Lowland Redgum Forest and Subtropical Rainforest.
- Protects the ecologically significant Hexham Swamp by establishing conservation land adjacent to the proposed new urban area around Minmi.

The Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) last year endorsed the Department of Planning and Infrastructure's recommendation to rezone the Minmi development site and the nearby conservation lands.

The PAC found that agreements and plans linked to the rezonings will protect the area's wildlife habitats, ecosystems and preserve historical and archaeological sites.

The new planning controls have been inserted today into the Cessnock, Lake Macquarie and Newcastle local environment plans.

Voluntary Planning Agreements with the Minister for Environment and Coal & Allied have been finalised to allow the transfer of conservation land to the NSW Government.

Under the terms of the agreement, Coal & Allied has agreed to transfer the conservation land at no cost to the NSW Government within three months of the conservation lands being subdivided from the residential area.

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