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**Newcastle city centre strategy wins major award**

The NSW Government today welcomed a prestigious award given to its long-term strategy to revitalise Newcastle city centre.

The award from the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) recognised that the strategy was underpinned by detailed and rigorous research and community consultation – both key aspects of the State’s new planning system.

The Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy last night (Thursday) received the award for “Best Planning Ideas – Large Project” in the PIA’s 2013 NSW Awards for Excellence in Planning.

The strategy was prepared by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure and Newcastle City Council and released for consultation in late 2012.

It supports the Newcastle city centre becoming a new commercial hub which will provide thousands of new jobs and homes and upgraded retail, entertainment and open space areas.

Department Director-General Sam Haddad said the award was a credit to the hard work undertaken by the department’s staff seeking to renew the Newcastle city centre.

“This award recognises the work we have undertaken to better plan upfront for homes, jobs and infrastructure in Newcastle,” he said.

“Importantly, the award also recognises the detailed community consultation process to complement the strategy, including the use of 3D animations and information sessions.

“Detailed strategic planning and improved community consultation are key facets of our new planning system and it is pleasing to see our work in this area has been judged as high-quality.

“There is still much work to be done to revitalise the Newcastle city centre but this award is a welcome endorsement from professional planners.”

The “Best Planning Ideas – Large Project” is given to a project that has town or city, regional, state-wide, national or cross-jurisdiction benefit.

In giving the award, the award jury stated:

“The recipient of this award faced a highly challenging environment and consideration of a wide range of complex issues to create a renewal strategy for one of NSW’s most significant cities.

“The judges noted the use of a well-established evidence based methodology and the comprehensive background analysis that underpinned the place based, transport and economic initiatives. The use of triple bottom line measures for environmental, social and economic sustainability was recognised as was the understanding that economic assessment and the testing controls were the key to the development of a robust strategy.
“The commitment to community consultation with its extended display period and information sessions was also seen as effective and the 3D model and animation was seen as particularly successful in helping to explain the ideas to the wider community.

“While many challenges remain in the implementation of the strategy, the project is to be commended for recognising the importance of places and spaces in urban renewal and for promoting civic and education facilities and encouraging both employment and residential uses in order to create a diverse and active city centre.”

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