Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2014 UPDATE
Newcastle was established in the early 1800s as a port to support the extensive coal mining operations in and around the area. Newcastle grew from this beginning into a thriving industrial centre for the Hunter region with extensive steel manufacturing operations.

Over the last 30 years, however, Newcastle has undergone significant change. It has experienced the closure of a number of major industrial employers such as BHP and the city has subsequently diversified with the education, health care and finance sectors all experiencing growth.

The Newcastle local government area has also experienced sustained population growth over the last decade.

Whilst parts of the city centre have declined in recent years, Newcastle is forecast to grow in the future, with the population projected to increase from 155,000 to 190,000 people by 2031.

These factors have provided opportunities for the reshaping of the city centre. For instance, the Honeysuckle Precinct has transformed the city’s former railway yards into a new waterfront commercial and residential area.

In 2012, the NSW Government prepared an urban renewal strategy for the Newcastle city centre. The strategy built upon work by the City of Newcastle, such as the Hunter Street Revitalisation Strategy adopted in 2010, as well as work undertaken by state agencies, such as the Hunter Development Corporation.

The draft Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy set a clear vision for Newcastle to grow, evolve and strengthen its position as the Hunter region’s capital whilst capitalising on the city’s unique attributes such as the heritage, natural setting and working harbour.

Consultation with the community, industry and government on the draft Strategy and changes to the local planning controls for the city centre was at the forefront of the changes.

The strategy proposed a number of initiatives to transform the Newcastle city centre into a vibrant and innovative regional hub and an attractive destination for businesses, residents and visitors alike.

This report provides an update to the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012, and in particular, it:

- updates the community on the actions that are already complete or underway to revitalise the city centre
- updates the implementation plan with the next steps for delivering urban renewal and the future choices that will need to be considered.

**KEY OBJECTIVES**

The key objectives of the strategy are to encourage urban renewal and the revitalisation of the city centre by:

- amending the local planning controls to promote growth, activity and innovation and to deliver up to 10,000 new jobs and 6,000 new homes over the next 25 years
- re-establishing Hunter Street as Newcastle’s main street, revitalising Hunter Street mall and the East End, recognising the city’s heritage as an important asset and improving the quality of public spaces and streets
- supporting employment growth, such as establishing a university presence within the Civic precinct and bringing retail businesses back into the city centre
- improving transport to make the city easier to access and move around in, better connected to the waterfront and to provide alternatives to car transport
- preparing an implementation plan with clear actions to support the strategy and deliver renewal over the next 20 years
In the last two years, the NSW Government has made a number of key decisions that will shape the future of the Newcastle city centre:

- Removing the heavy rail between Wickham and Newcastle stations and providing a new transport interchange at Wickham for rail, light rail and buses, with all services on one level for easy transfers
- Introducing high frequency light rail services between Wickham and the beach utilising the rail corridor for part of the route and then moving south to Hunter Street, then moving east onto Scott Street to the beach, avoiding impacts on the Hunter Street Mall
- $340 million from the proceeds of the Port of Newcastle lease, together with $120 million from the Hunter Investment & Infrastructure Fund and Restart NSW, will be used for the revitalisation of the Newcastle CBD and the Wickham transport interchange, including heavy rail truncation and the provision of light rail
- Amending the Newcastle Local Environmental Plan 2012 to establish a new planning framework to drive renewal of the city centre
- Introducing a Development Control Plan for the city centre, which provides detailed planning controls to ensure that new development meets high standards of design and environmental quality
- UrbanGrowth NSW is working with the GPT Group to facilitate the master planning and redevelopment of key sites around the Hunter Street Mall in the East End
- Construction of the $94 million law courts complex at Hunter and Burwood Streets is set to be completed in 2014
- $25 million allocated to the University of Newcastle’s NeW Space development at Civic, which will establish business and law faculties within the city centre
- Hunter Development Corporation contributed land worth $2.8 million to the redevelopment of the Empire Hotel site, which will include at least 25 affordable dwellings
NEWCASTLE’S SIGNIFICANCE

Newcastle is the second largest city in NSW and is the capital of the Hunter region. The city includes regionally significant infrastructure such as:

- the Port of Newcastle, one of the world’s largest coal export ports and a significant driver for the state economy
- the Newcastle Airport, which provides regular services to and from Sydney, interstate capitals and regional NSW
- the John Hunter Hospital, the main hospital for Newcastle and much of northern NSW
- the University of Newcastle, one of Australia’s leading national universities

The Newcastle CBD also provides a range of functions including commercial, retail, entertainment, cultural, educational and transport services.

The city centre enjoys attractive natural amenity because of its location on the peninsula between the Pacific Ocean and the Hunter River with beaches and the harbour. The city has a varied topography which is complemented by historic buildings that are rich in character.

Notwithstanding these positive attributes, Newcastle has experienced significant challenges over the past 30 years. Events such as the global economic recession of the early 1980s, the Newcastle earthquake in 1989, the closure of BHP in 1999 and the recent Global Financial Crisis have all impacted the physical, social and economic fabric of the city.

Over the past two decades, the role of Hunter Street and the city centre has changed. Hunter Street’s position as the primary retail destination for the city has weakened with the expansion of suburban shopping centres. Similarly, its role as the commercial centre for the city has also declined.

Despite these challenges, the city centre has continued to evolve and change. For instance, the removal of industry from the city centre and the closure of the BHP steelworks provided a large amount of land for redevelopment.

The Hunter Development Corporation formed in the early 1990s to renew obsolete railway and industrial lands along the waterfront of the Hunter River. The Honeysuckle area has been successfully transformed into a mixed use precinct with commercial office space and new housing.
Today, Newcastle’s city centre has a large and diverse range of land uses. It is the primary location for civic, commercial and cultural activities in the region.

Hunter Street forms the main commercial spine of the city centre. At its eastern end, there is commercial and retail focused on the Hunter Street Mall.

Entertainment, cultural and civic uses are located within the Civic Precinct, focused around Wheeler Place and include the Newcastle Museum and City Hall.

The west end provides a mix of commercial and retail uses and includes the city centre’s main shopping centre. Wickham contains a mix of industry, commercial, retail and homes.

North of the railway line is the Honeysuckle precinct which has emerged as the primary location for new commercial office space in the city.

Residential suburbs such as Cooks Hill are clustered around the city centre.

The city centre is well provided for with public open spaces, including Birdwood Park in the west, Civic Park in the centre, Cathedral Park and Pacific Park in the east as well as the Foreshore Park.

The west end and Civic are largely built upon the floodplain of the Hunter River and Cottage Creek and consequently are relatively flat.

By contrast, the east end of the city is located on two steep hills, providing a scenic backdrop to the city centre when viewed from the foreshore of the Hunter River. Significant buildings sit atop these hills, such as the Christ Church Cathedral and are dominant landmarks on the skyline.

Urban renewal initiatives should focus on enhancing these existing attributes, for example, connecting the city to the waterfront, recognising heritage significance, bringing retail and people back to the East End, strengthening the Civic precinct and planning for long term growth in the West End.
OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW AND EXPAND
Zone land to ensure the economic sustainability of the city centre and accommodate anticipated growth and trends.
Identify and monitor sites and areas suitable for large-scale retail and commercial development.

ECONOMIC VIABILITY AND COMPETITION
Support a diverse range of retail, commercial and residential uses in the city centre.
Promote development that provides increased consumer choice and strong, diverse services.
Promote flexibility to accommodate emerging trends in retailing and other uses.

BUSY AND VIBRANT CITY CENTRE
The city centre should develop its own character and identity that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community.
The city’s identity should be used positively in the branding and marketing of the city centre, assist with attraction of new investment, and give a strong sense of community and place.

URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY
The Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy aims to make the Newcastle city centre a vibrant and innovative regional hub and an attractive destination for business, residents and visitors, providing accessible and suitable employment opportunities, a choice of retail and other services, and local, national and international investment opportunities.

The Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012 proposed a range of initiatives that could be implemented to encourage renewal in the city centre including:

- Amendments to the planning framework to promote activity, development and well located land uses
- Physical improvements to the city’s key public spaces
- Economic initiatives that will support urban renewal
- Actions to improve transport, access and connectivity to and within the city centre.

The objectives of the strategy are to ensure that:

- The strength of the city is recognised and reinforced, relative to other centres within the local government area
- The city centre is a vibrant, viable and attractive destination for business, residents and visitors
- The city centre provides accessible and suitable employment opportunities as well as a mix of retail and service facilities
- The city centre’s retail and employment lands are attractive for investment by local, national and international businesses, both now and in the future
- All parts of the city centre are well connected and easy to access.
INTEGRITY AND VIABILITY
The growth and development of the city centre should support and reinforce the existing integrity and uniqueness of Newcastle. The adaptive reuse of heritage buildings should be encouraged and supported by a planning framework that encourages innovation.

HOUSING MIX AND AFFORDABILITY
Deliver more residential developments in the city centre to enhance day and night activity and support jobs and services. Encourage a range of housing types for a variety of markets, including student and seniors housing.

INVESTMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND GROWTH
Population growth in the city centre will increase demand for jobs and services, necessitating additional investment. Support growth and expansion of existing businesses in the planning framework. Existing and emerging business to be supported through targeted investment attraction strategies.

RETAIL VARIETY AND CHOICE
Support supermarkets and provide a range of convenient retail options to enhance competition, thereby maintaining the economic viability of the city centre. Recognise the regional demand for bulky goods retailing whilst still protecting existing industrial land.

TRANSPORT, ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY
Maximise accessibility to and within the city centre and prioritise public transport, walking and cycling to reduce private vehicle use. Deliver new connections between the city centre and the waterfront. Encourage pedestrian activity throughout the city centre. Link key city centre precincts and destinations with a modern light rail system.

PROVIDE FOR FUTURE EMPLOYMENT GROWTH
Promote a commercial core with a range of employment-generating activities. Cluster shared resources and services to attract new business. Preserve employment zoned land that can accommodate relatively large floor plates, so that the city centre is the primary location for commercial offices.
These urban renewal initiatives seek to reintroduce and support development of the distinct character areas of the West End, Civic and East End. These areas exhibit distinctly different characteristics and present significant opportunities for built form and public domain changes and improvements. The new light rail system will link these areas and improve connectivity and accessibility throughout the city centre.

**URBAN RENEWAL INITIATIVES**

**LONG TERM GROWTH IN THE WEST END**
- Redevelop large consolidated lots, and support interim uses, such as showrooms and large-format retail
- Increase public space including a new connection along Cottage Creek
- Plan for long term city expansion in the West End

**PROMOTE THE CITY CENTRE AS AN EDUCATIONAL HUB**
- Facilitate new University of Newcastle city campus
- Support new research facilities
STRENGTHEN THE CIVIC PRECINCT
- Encourage civic uses such as the new university campus and law courts
- Improve Wheeler Place with additional shade and seating
- Reinforce the ‘cultural axis’ from Civic Park to the waterfront with improved public domain and signage

REVITALISE HUNTER STREET MALL
- Declutter the Hunter Street Mall and upgrade the public domain and street furniture to provide a pleasant pedestrian experience
- Encourage mixed use development with more residents to support local businesses
- Support the redevelopment of key sites, laneways and spaces that connect to the Mall and the foreshore

RECOGNISE NEWCASTLE’S HERITAGE
- Retain and re-purpose heritage buildings that contribute to the character and history of the city

KEY
- Commercial uses
- Civic and municipal
- Retail uses
- Residential areas
- Parks
- Potential light rail stop
A number of transport initiatives will support better connections and access to and within the city centre. This is an important component of the city centre’s urban renewal, and of creating an active and liveable city.

The transport initiatives seek to encourage the use of more sustainable forms of transport, such as public transport, walking and cycling, and reduce reliance on private car use.

The key benefits include:

- improved accessibility within the city centre
- supporting an increased and more concentrated residential and employment population, without a concurrent increase in traffic congestion
- the creation of an attractive, vibrant place

MANAGE DEMAND FOR CAR PARKING

- Undertake an annual review of parking and consider expanding parking controls to inner city areas
- Consider setting limits on the amount of car parking available in the city centre

CREATE A CONNECTED WALKING AND CYCLING NETWORK

- Implement the City of Newcastle’s Cycling Strategy and Action Plan
- Promote end-of-trip facilities for cyclists such as bike racks and showering facilities
IMPLEMENT THE LIGHT RAIL
• Deliver a new light rail system that connects key activity areas, with frequent services between Wickham and the beach at least every 10 minutes
• Construct a new, fully accessible interchange at Wickham for rail, light rail and buses, with all services on one level for easy transfers

CONNECT THE CITY WITH ITS WATERFRONT
• Create new road and/or pedestrian crossings, re-connecting the city centre to the waterfront
• Improve signage
• Improve the public domain with new landscaping and footpath paving

RE-ESTABLISH HUNTER STREET AS NEWCASTLE’S MAIN STREET
• Concentrate activity in nodes
• Enhance Hunter Street for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users
• Improve the quality of the public domain by widening footpaths and adding more landscaping

IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ROAD NETWORK FOR ALL USERS
• Upgrade the road network and key intersections where there is congestion or safety issues
• Reinforce Hunter Street as a key route for all users
Since community consultation for the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy began in December 2012, many of the actions identified in the implementation plan have been completed or are underway.

The NSW Government has announced the route for the light rail between Wickham and the beach. This will have a significant bearing on the future shape of the city centre.

The next steps for revitalising Newcastle include transport initiatives and public domain improvement projects in the city centre.

UrbanGrowth NSW is responsible for urban renewal in Newcastle and Transport for New South Wales is responsible for transport. The City of Newcastle will have an important role in implementing local initiatives.

### Wickham interchange announced

- In December 2012, the NSW Government announced the truncation of the heavy rail line, and committed $120 million to support urban renewal in the city centre.
- The NSW Government announced in 2013 that light rail would be introduced into the city centre between Wickham and the East End.
- In December 2013 the NSW Government announced that a new fully accessible transport interchange would be built at Wickham. The interchange has potential to trigger new development and commercial buildings in the West End.
- Expressions of interest were sought in June 2014 for the design and construction of the Wickham interchange as part of the NSW Government’s commitment to commence construction of the interchange by December 2014.

### Newcastle Port lease

- In April 2014, the NSW Premier and the Treasurer announced the successful lease of the Port of Newcastle securing the funds needed for the revitalisation of Newcastle.
- The NSW Government agreed to lease the port for 98 years which is set to deliver gross proceeds of $1.75 billion, of which $340 million will be used for the revitalisation of the Newcastle CBD.

### Light rail route selected

- Consultation was undertaken on route options for the light rail. The preferred route was announced in May 2014 and will use part of the existing rail corridor east of Wickham before moving south onto Hunter Street and then Scott Street to maximise urban renewal opportunities, while avoiding any impacts on the Hunter Street Mall.
Hunter Regional Transport Plan

- In April 2014, the Minister for Transport, released the Hunter Regional Transport Plan.
- The plan outlines specific actions to improve and develop Newcastle’s transport system and includes the new light rail network that will revitalise the city centre.

University of Newcastle Campus

- The University of Newcastle is relocating its business and law faculties to the city centre. The new building, known as “NeW Space Campus” will include a library, information centre and collaborative learning spaces.
- The University has received funding from the State and Federal Governments for the construction of the new campus, which is anticipated to be completed in time for the 2017 academic year.

Lower Hunter Regional Strategy

- The Department of Planning & Environment released a discussion paper for the new Lower Hunter Regional Strategy and consulted with the community in 2013. The strategy emphasises the important role Newcastle has in the Hunter region.

Newcastle LEP amendment finalised

- The Newcastle LEP amendment was finalised in 2014. The amendment establishes new zoning, height and density controls to promote urban renewal, provide new areas for housing and encourage employment and economic activity.

Newcastle branding strategy

- Newcastle NOW completed a branding strategy for the city, which encourages all Newcastle based businesses, groups and events to use the Newcastle brand to promote the city and attract visitors.

Support local business and tourism

- The City of Newcastle and Newcastle NOW have established the Facade Improvement Scheme which provides grants to help fund upgrades to building facades in the city centre.
- The City of Newcastle provides grants for community based projects through its ‘Make Your Place’ Community Grants Program.
- Renew Newcastle assists in finding short and medium term uses for vacant buildings in Newcastle’s CBD until they become commercially viable or are redeveloped.

Development Control Plan adopted

- The Development Control Plan for the city centre was exhibited in 2014. The DCP incorporates many of the detailed urban design principles and controls from the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012.

State law courts nearing completion

- Construction of the Newcastle law courts at Hunter and Burwood Streets commenced in 2013 and is set to be finished by the end of 2014. The $94 million project will provide more courtrooms and modern facilities.
The Urban Renewal Strategy is set to continue through the following activities:

**Implement the light rail**
- Construction of the new interchange at Wickham will commence in December 2014.
- Heavy rail truncation at Wickham is scheduled to occur on 26th December 2014.
- Transport for NSW will work with UrbanGrowth NSW and the Newcastle City Council to determine how the light rail will best be integrated with the road network in the city centre.

**New connections to waterfront**
- Implement new north-south connections across the rail corridor for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles between the city centre and the waterfront.

**Improve the transport network**
- The NSW Government will work with Newcastle City Council to improve transport into and around the city centre.
- Ensure that these connections are compatible with the light rail.

Transport for NSW will support the City of Newcastle to implement local initiatives to support a functional and efficient transport network, including:
- Promoting a shift to public transport in the city centre
- Creating a connected pedestrian and cycling network
- Providing dedicated bicycle lanes
- Improving the efficiency of the road network
- Managing the impact of car parking
- The Opal electronic ticketing system will be rolled out across the Hunter region by the end of 2014. Opal will provide an easy, convenient and fast way of travelling on public transport.

**Redevelop key sites in the East End**
- UrbanGrowth NSW and GPT Group are working together to deliver urban renewal outcomes in the east of the city centre.
- The redevelopment of key sites in the East End will provide a mix of residential apartments, boutique and lifestyle retail and commercial office space.
- UrbanGrowth NSW is facilitating the masterplanning of the precinct and its staged release to the market. The development application for the Concept Plan for the Hunter Street Mall was submitted to the City of Newcastle in March 2014.
- The redevelopment of the East End precinct will be a significant catalyst for the city centre’s revitalisation, and in particular Hunter Street Mall.
- Community consultation will be ongoing, including the Design Newcastle consultation initiative to engage the community on the renewal of the city centre.

**Economic development**
- The City of Newcastle is preparing a Newcastle Economic Development Strategy that will incorporate strategies and actions for the city centre economy.

**Mine subsidence**
- The Mine Subsidence Taskforce will develop more detailed guidelines to accompany the Mine Subsidence Map and provide information about the magnitude of mine workings and likely extent of grouting.
FUTURE CHOICES

Choices will need to be made about a number of areas that will help shape the implementation of the Urban Renewal Strategy.

**Future use of the rail corridor**
- Truncating the rail line at Wickham creates opportunities to reconnect the city centre to the waterfront.
- The community will be consulted on possible future uses for the Civic and Newcastle railway stations and disused rail corridor land as part of the revitalisation of Newcastle.

**Transform Hunter Street**
- The City of Newcastle has committed approximately $2.6 million as part of its 2013/14 capital works program for revitalising Hunter Street.
- The City of Newcastle consulted with the community in 2013 about temporary improvements, however any decisions were put on hold until the light rail route was chosen.
- Public domain upgrades to Hunter Street should be finalised by the City of Newcastle when more detail is available on the light rail project and its implementation program.
- Any upgrades should be compatible with the light rail route and the City of Newcastle’s public domain plans.

**Long term light rail network**
- Transport for New South Wales is responsible for how the light rail network could be extended in the future and how to better connect with key destinations and centres.
- Further community consultation on the light rail route will be undertaken as part of the environmental approval process for the light rail design.

**Revitalise Hunter Street Mall**
- Potential improvements could include removing market structures and freestanding advertisements which clutter the mall, upgrading the laneway network behind the mall and upgrading the pedestrian link bridge to the waterfront and the square.

**Design Newcastle Consultation**
- A key aspect of the revitalisation of the city centre will be community consultation, such as the Design Newcastle initiative launched in June 2014 which will involve the community in decisions about public space, heritage and transport.

**Upgrade public spaces**
- The City of Newcastle is responsible for upgrades to public spaces such as Wheeler Place, Cottage Creek, Crown Street and Birdwood Park. Any upgrades should be consistent with the City of Newcastle’s public domain plans.