

**SUBJECT:               REPORT ON NOTICE OF MOTION – NOM 23/05/23 –  
NEWCASTLE CITY CBD – VANDALISM – GRAFFITI  
ATTACKS – CRIME PREVENTION – BUSINESS  
RETENTION – REVIEW OF MAINSTREET ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT CITY CONSTRUCTION –  
3 YEARS – 2023-2026**

**REPORT BY:           EXECUTIVE OFFICE**

**CONTACT:             CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

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## **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER COMMENT**

### **Hunter Street Mall**

The Hunter Street Newcastle East End Stage One Streetscape Plan was approved by Council in June 2018 to complement the Mall's overhaul by Iris Capital's \$700 million four stage East End Development by rehabilitating aging public infrastructure and revitalising the space to bring people and businesses back into the area.

The objective of the Plan was to enable the revitalisation of the city's East End via the reinstatement of the Hunter Street Mall as a traditional high street.

The scope of the original plan was then extended to include work between Perkins Street and Brown Street, taking in the redundant Hunter Street Mall bus stop, and was approved by Council in May 2020.

This additional work was to enable wider footpaths for outdoor dining, new landscaping and a traffic closure to help activate two dormant laneways.

Stage one of the East End Village revitalisation project was completed by City of Newcastle (CN) in 2022 at a cost of more than \$5 million. The stage targeted the block bound by Hunter Street, Wolfe Street, King Street and Perkins Street. The upgrade delivered new paving, landscaping and public amenity improvements in and around Hunter Street Mall.

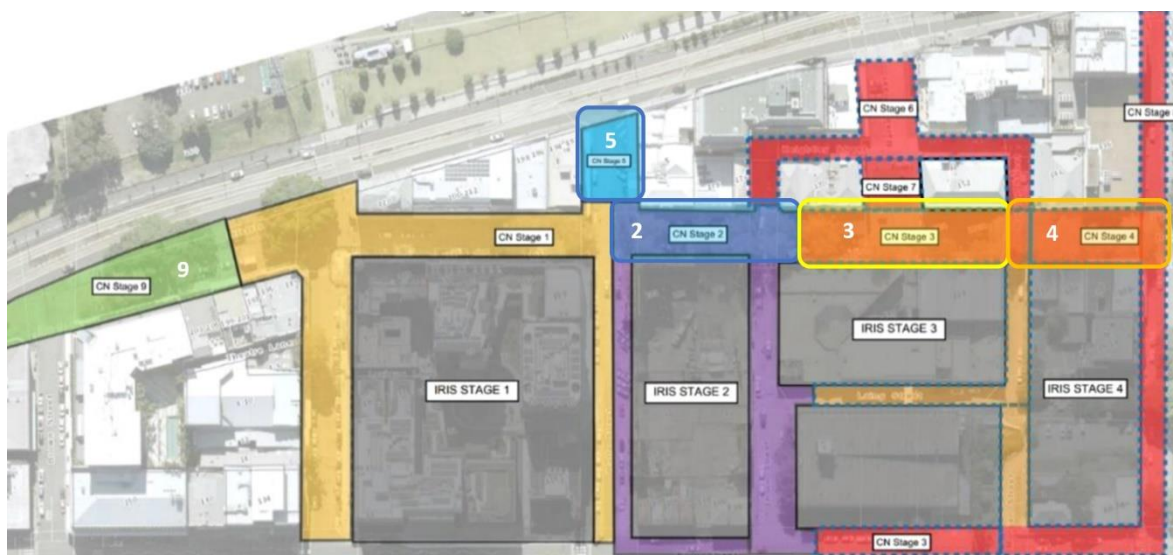
On 11 May this year CN announced construction will commence on stage 2 in June 2023. This work is valued at approximately \$1.9 million and is in addition to \$7.7 million already invested by CN into revitalising the Hunter St Mall.

This second stage will focus on a section of Hunter Street bound by Perkins and Browns Streets, as a key pedestrian and cyclist entry point to the East End Village. The streetscape will be improved with new trees and landscaping, and we will realign the road from Brown Street, including relocating and upgrading underground services. Wider footpaths will make way for alfresco dining and new street trees will increase shade cover, with the work also to include upgraded street lighting, road surfaces and stormwater infrastructure.

Iris Capital submitted a development application for the third phase of its East End development on 12 May 2023. This stage covers the section bounded by Hunter, Newcomen, King and Laing Streets and contains the former food court and retail spaces.

Separately, CN approved a DA on 28 April 2023 permitting Iris to commence demolition of several buildings which are part of the stage 3 development, following police concerns regarding anti-social behaviour. This has included graffiti and mass vandalism of closed buildings such as fires and flooding.

CN is currently investigating whether an abbreviated construction timeline could be accommodated, reducing the overall completion of the public domain of the Hunter Street Mall by 50% to just over 12 months. Preliminary discussions have occurred with Iris Capital regarding their support, and can be described as positive to date.



### **Support for City Centre Businesses**

Since Council's adoption of the Hunter Street Newcastle East End Stage One Streetscape Plan in 2018, CN has invested more than \$8.5 million in projects which directly or indirectly support City Centre businesses.

This includes:

#### **Special Business Rates program:**

Around \$3.3 million invested in projects to activate, beautify or stimulate the local economy. Key initiatives include:

- Big Picture Festival – murals, performances, activations and associated programming / tours throughout the City Centre

- Newcastle Food Month – supported annually since 2019 with a range of events and subsidies for local eateries to provide \$25 'plate dates' and feature events
- Chalk the Walk – temporary chalk art installations and associated walking tours and business promotions through the CBD
- Small Walls graffiti prevention program – a project engaging local artists and youth groups to beautify graffiti hotspots with murals and public artworks
- Hanging garden installations through Herb Urban to beautify CBD buildings and public spaces
- A further \$900,000 in special business rate funding will be made available to businesses to activate and promote the City Centre in August 2023.

#### **COVID-19 Community and Economic Resilience Package:**

This was a \$5.5 million program that included a range of support for local businesses including:

- Financial hardship support for businesses (rate payment plans and waivers of interest)
- Training for local business owners
- Lean in Newy – app developed which supported local businesses with CN-funded promotions

#### **Autumn Alive Event**

This program in 2022 saw \$80,000 directly invested into City Centre businesses to provide live music and other activations, as part of an overall investment of \$500,000.

#### **New Annual**

Since its launch and with an annual investment of around \$800,000, New Annual sees 10 days of programming primarily around the City Centre attracting thousands of visitors. Last year's Van Gogh Alive saw more than 80,000 tickets sold. The September 2022 New Annual also included grants of \$10,000 provided to City Centre businesses to support them in providing complementary programming as part of the event based on the Autumn Alive model.

#### **Locally Made and Played**

Locally Made and Played has seen almost \$50,000 in live music grants awarded to City Centre venues to encourage live music performances.

### **City Intelligence Platform**

CN is in the final stages of testing the City Intelligence Platform, an interactive web tool which will provide small business owners with free access to a range of information and data such as spending in their area at any given time, people movement and development activity. This will enable business owners to make evidence-based decisions on foot traffic, proximity of competition product and suppliers and economic spend trends by neighbourhood.

### **Graffiti**

Part 4 of the Graffiti Control Act 2008 deals with Graffiti removal work by local councils. It covers both graffiti removal work done by agreement with the owner or occupier (s11) and without agreement of owner or occupier (s12).

Under s11, a local council may, by agreement with the owner or occupier of any private land, carry out graffiti removal work on the land.

Under s12(1), a local council may, without the agreement of the owner or occupier of any land, carry out graffiti removal work to property on that land if the graffiti concerned is visible from a public place.

However, this graffiti removal must only be carried out from a public place (s12(2)), council is to bear the cost of this graffiti removal work (s12(3)) and council must, within a reasonable period, give the owner or occupier of the land concerned written notice that the work has occurred (s12(4)). Under s12(5) council must pay compensation for any damage caused by the council in carrying out graffiti removal work in accordance with this section.

The overall cost of writing to business owners in the City Centre is currently unknown. A letter can be included in with selected Rate Notices by CN's contracted Security Printer/Mailing House at minimal cost. Letters would need to be finalised by 7 July 2023 in order to be sent with the next quarterly rates notice. This approach however would not include up to one quarter of property owners who have chosen to receive their Rates Notice by email.

Limitations of the current platform do not permit another letter to be sent within their Rates Notice email. Instead, these would have to be manually processed as separate emails by staff, and with no certainty that graffiti exists on the properties of those being written to. The cost of this would be \$1.10 in postage, plus letter, envelope and staff labour.

### **The Business Centre**

City of Newcastle has a positive and ongoing relationship with the Business Centre, and has collaborated on a number of business support programs over many years.

The Business Centre is located at 265 King St, Newcastle and is a community organisation that relies on grants from local, state and federal governments that has existed for more than 34 years.

The Business Centre use locally employed business advisers who understand the

challenges small businesses have in the area. They aim to assist new and existing businesses through a range of low-cost services, including:

- in-person or online business advice
- workshops
- training programs
- events
- virtual tenancies
- new business assistance through Self-Employment Assistance.

Since 2015 City of Newcastle has provided the Business Centre with approximately \$126,000 in financial support, including \$50,000 in 2020 for the City Taskforce's COVID-19 Industry Response Program's Small Business Recovery Project.

The Business Centre has recently received adequate resourcing from the Federal Government to fund their new multi-year Entrepreneurship Pathway Program. CN is supporting this project in-kind with referrals and promotion.

## **ALTERNATE RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

- 1 notes City of Newcastle staff are currently reviewing opportunities to align stages 2, 3, 4 and 5 of its revitalisation of the Hunter Street Mall with public domain works required by Iris Capital as part of its current stage 2 development, and future stage 3 and 4 developments.
- 2 notes City of Newcastle staff are currently reviewing opportunities to focus resources specifically on development of the Hunter Street public domain to not only bring forward the beautification of Hunter Street, but bring forward the economic benefits for retailers in preparation for completion of Iris Capital's future stage 3 and 4 developments.
- 3 welcomes CN's investment of more than \$8.5 million in events and activation programs developed to support local City Centre businesses since 2018.
- 4 notes that CN has provided approximately \$126,000 in financial support to the Business Centre since 2015, including \$50,000 in 2020 for the City Taskforce's COVID-19 Industry Response Program's Small Business Recovery Project.
- 5 notes that individuals and businesses can apply for funding in August this year to deliver projects and programs that activate and promote the City Center as part of a \$900,000 program funded via the Special Business Rates levy.