

Parks & Playgrounds Movement Inc

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Honeysuckle how did it happen?

Honeysuckle was initially a \$100 million dollar Commonwealth Building Better Cities project and should be evaluated on the principle that what has happened has contributed to building a better city. The question is could the millions of dollars have obtained a better outcome?

Honeysuckle and the spread of the Growth Centre Area cannot be understood without consideration of the initial Newcastle CBD Business Plan May 1988 that quietly identified Newcastle's publicly owned properties and earmarked them for privatisation and established the City Centre Committee. The Central Honeysuckle catastrophe however requires reference to the statutory Regional Environmental Plan 1989 amendment No.3 Central Honeysuckle and why the Minister for Planning gazetted it in December 1997.

The amendment No3 of the Regional Environmental Plan 1989 made the Minister the Consent Authority for Development Applications and still operates for Central Honeysuckle.

A clause in the Newcastle Council's LEP 2003 stating that the REP be revoked is not valid and has no effect which means that most of the land in Central Honeysuckle now has two zones the *REP 3(e) Urban Waterfront zone* and the *Newcastle Council LEP 2003 3(c) City Centre zone*.. REP 1989 cannot be revoked by a Council LEP as clause 4 on page 16 states that the REP 1989 will prevail in any inconsistency with any other planning Instrument. The 3(e) prevails in law and this anomaly should be corrected

It is all part of the confusing and deceitful planning and assessment process at Honeysuckle.

The State has been able to wall off of the harbour from the city by development contrary to the statutory plan because of the confused responsibilities between Council, Honeysuckle and the Consent Authority and the resultant lack of transparency and ineffective public scrutiny.

When asked, the Minister's Department DIPNR would no doubt believe that everything done to date has had the assessment and approval of the Newcastle City Council even though the Minister is the Consent Authority. The truth that some Development Applications are referred to the Newcastle Council hides the fact that the Minister is the real consent authority.

The proposed Flinders Cove was a central feature of the Allen Jack and Cottier, *Urban Design Plan Newcastle Civic Area*. It was adopted by Council and given

statutory force in the Hunter REP 1989 amendment No3 and was promised by the State Government to the city for the 1997 bicentenary of Shortland's discovery of coal and the Hunter River.

The statutory plan should have been reviewed when the Government decided to scrap the cove and build buildings in the cove area. This would have given planners the opportunity to review the road pattern that had been adopted to implement the Cove and the Cottier Urban Design.

Newcastle Council's Development Control Plans are legally required to comply with the statutory plan but were misused as part of the whole corrupt planning process.

The last feature left of the Cottier urban design is the parkland square-about which is zoned 6(a) open space and classified Community Land. A public hearing is required under the provisions of the Local Government and EP&A Acts but the area is about to disappear along with its justification in the REP No3.

In November 1996 more than a year before REP amendment No.3 was made, Honeysuckle advertised for expressions of interest in the development of Merewether Street Wharf. The Corporation incorrectly claimed that the Newcastle Council had adopted plans for condominiums and hotels. However REP amendment No.3 made by the Minister on 10th of December 1997 was the first plan that would allow residential buildings to be built in the Central Honeysuckle area. Prior to this the zoning the development allowed was port related development, wharves marshalling yards etc. The REP amendment No.3 removed Consent Authority status from the Newcastle Council.

The first Concept Master Plan 1991 for Honeysuckle proposed an imaginative use of the waterfront but was predicated on a politically flawed process by the then Minister for Local Government. The concept plan had no statutory base and little public support from Newcastle people especially for the cutting of rail services into Newcastle. It showed a generous open foreshore of quays, marinas and open spaces but didn't show the extent of foreshore land holding and the amount of land that was submerged land under the harbour.

Honeysuckle had purchased the wharfage from the NSW Port Authority and demolished the wharves. The cadastral boundary of the holding was the wharf fender line and the cost of rebuilding the waterfront maintaining the sea wall or reclaiming the submerged land would be a cost against Honeysuckle. The State Government could have shouldered the cost as it did at the Rocks development in Sydney.

The 1990-91 gestation of Honeysuckle concept was mixed with the turbulent political processes that followed the sacking of the Newcastle Council.

The 1988 CBD business plan was generated by the Business Chamber and the Council and was never exhibited for public comment..

After the Newcastle earthquake in December 1989 the Business plan seemed to become policy without the checks and balances of statutory planning. Honeysuckle became a Building Better Cities project and members were appointed to Honeysuckle from the Business Chamber, as were the Citycentre Committee members. Citycentre

was established independently of Council but funded from a special council rate. The Newcastle Alliance now has a similar role and funding.

The majority of Newcastle People are concerned at what has happened at Central Honeysuckle and a new transparent Honeysuckle planning and assessment process that responds to the wishes and aspirations of Newcastle people is desperately needed. Central Honeysuckle has been allowed to develop without normal transparency and this situation should be remedied.

A Commission of Inquiry before the minister determines the consent for the currently proposed Lee Wharf development would be a positive start and the establishment of a clear open planning and assessment regime for Central Honeysuckle the next essential step.

Doug Lithgow

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