



Australian
Institute of
Architects

Wickham Master Plan

**Submission to Newcastle City
Council**

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SUBMISSION BY

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PURPOSE

This submission is made by the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to Newcastle City Council in response to the draft Wickham Master Plan.

At the time of the submission the office bearers of the NSW Chapter are:

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The Executive Director of the NSW Chapter is Joshua Morrin. This paper was prepared by the Chapter's Newcastle Division for Chapter Council.

INFORMATION

Who is making this submission?

- The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is an independent voluntary subscription-based member organization with approximately 11,553 members who are bound by a Code of Conduct and disciplinary procedures.
- The Institute, incorporated in 1929, is one of the 96 member associations of the International Union of Architects (UIA) and is represented on the International Practice Commission.
- The Institute's New South Wales Chapter has 3,348 members, of which 1,951 are registrable architect members – representing 43% of all registered architects in NSW.

Where does the Institute rank as a professional association?

- At 11,553 members, the RIAA represents the largest group of non-engineer design professionals in Australia.
- Other related organisations by membership size include: The Design Institute of Australia (DIA) - 1,500 members; the Building Designers Association of Australia (BDAA) - 2,200 members; the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) - 1,435 members; and the Australian Academy of Design (AAD) - 150 members.



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INTRODUCTION

The Newcastle Division of the Australian Institute of Architects NSW Chapter welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Wickham master plan. We are keen to assist Council planners with the incorporation of the ideas in this submission into the draft master plan. There could be great benefits in this form of collaboration.

The development of supporting guideline documents seems to be a logical outcome from this review.

OVERVIEW

The anchor of the new transport interchange and the open space assets of Wickham Park and Throsby Creek provide the opportunity for a new vision for the Wickham precinct based on social equity and environmental sustainability.

The plan currently lacks a central planning idea or concept; an improved connection between the Wickham Park area and Throsby Creek may provide the seed for this big idea.

The plan is also an opportunity to create a precinct that provides a balance between housing, employment, entertainment and recreational opportunities. The worst result would be a dense high-rise dormitory suburb.

We support plans for increased population density and building height near major transport nodes, but this must be balanced by improved amenity and access to open space and recreational opportunities. Social and community needs can be served by inclusionary zoning, developer contributions and integrated planning solutions. Precinct planning also needs to begin to address the social housing deficit in Newcastle as a whole.

We acknowledge the challenge of planning for a new precinct to replace the old one. We are concerned, however, that the current 'industrial village' character of Wickham is going to be completely lost. It is important to retain a 'sense of place' which doesn't sterilise the nature of the area.

The master plan fails to address how current residential density will compare to density under the proposed FSRs. Most of Wickham's residential density is 50 or less dwellings per hectare. The proposed FSRs will transform most of Wickham to 240 or greater dwellings per hectare.

We note that the proposed FSRs are based on the recommendations in the Economic & Market Analysis report. This report has established the FSRs based on current market data. The problem is that the current volatility of the market may result in exaggerated FSRs.

The 11 storey height limit in Map 15 is questionable; even eight storeys is too high.

The plan should encourage development that facilitates the retention of community centres and childcare services and the expansion of local schools and public open space. A focus on young people, the homeless, industry and trade business hubs should also be encouraged.

It is unclear how this plan links with the West End plan and the broader planning for greater Newcastle.

The following notes address aspects of the plan in more detail:

1. Housing

The plan must address the housing affordability issue within the context of a diverse mix of housing scales and types. In line with the recent "Common Ground" housing tower project in Brisbane and the NSW Government's "Going home staying home" policy, social housing must become an integrated part of the city's social balance, rather than relying on the usual approach of creating single building enclaves.

A minimum percentage of affordable housing should also be scattered through the precinct.

The opportunity to promote and reward developers who incorporate mixed housing types within single higher density developments should be explored. Buildings mixing bed-sits, two and three bed apartments, luxury housing, commercial and community spaces should be favoured.

The plan should allow for deliberative community-based housing models, such as the Nightingale concept that is being developed in Melbourne.

2. Design

The Institute recommends the preparation of a Newcastle specific housing design guide similar to the City of London's successful guide. This will ensure a minimum standard of housing design that is consistent across all new development. The guide can mandate a minimum level of private amenity for every dwelling and introduce universal design principles so that residents can age in their dwellings.

The implementation of design guidelines requiring streets, housing and public buildings are kept clean, neat and tidy will increase the longevity and presentation quality of the precinct.

The plan should provide for the 'coordinated variety' of new development. This encourages the contributions of several designers, while collectively addressing their context.

The application of passive design principles will reduce life cycle costs.

The plan should encourage upper level public and commercial spaces and bridging routes between neighbouring developments and across rail line and car traffic at Hannell and Railway Streets, incorporated with high level parking and flood refuge opportunities.

All new designed elements should meet rigorous environmental benchmarks. The local architecture and planning professions can support good design by providing peer review services as part of the DA approval process. Design excellence along the foreshore is particularly important. We recommend competitions as the means of procuring the best possible design.

A Wickham Design Ideas Competition would encourage new ideas on this area's design possibilities.

3. Flood Refuge

The whole precinct has been identified as being at significant flood risk. A comprehensive approach to water capture and treatment needs to be developed. Wickham could be an exemplar for how to deal with these issues.

There is a need to integrate elevated public space into the planning for Wickham to provide refuge from extreme storm and tidal events identified in the LEP flood maps.

The construction of new buildings within Wickham will intensify projected flood impacts onto the remaining open space. Flood refuge facilities therefore need to be financed or incorporated within each building approval. Developer contributions should be negotiated to manage the public safety needs of the community.

Stormwater detention needs to be integrated below roads, cycleways, parking areas, public spaces and landscape zones.

Landscape infiltration zones need to be provided as buffers between the rail corridor and residential development.

A semi permeable surface is needed to deal with ground water.

Green zones in streets will deal with storm water runoff and flooding and help with preventing the heat island effect.

4. Public Transport

Acoustic impact from the rail interchange must be managed carefully. Landscape buffers, land contouring, plantings, parking spaces and cycleways need to be provided between the railway corridor and residential buildings.

Better transport connection from outer suburbs is essential.

City to Stockton traffic can be captured with a new Wickham Ferry Terminal that benefits Stockton links to local supermarkets through Wickham. This will reduce car traffic from Stockton.

5. Traffic Management

Key parking locations must be strongly linked to public transport. Parking should generally be minimised to encourage foot traffic and the use of public transport.

The traffic flow through Wickham and around Wickham Park needs to be improved; one-way streets don't encourage easy traffic flow.

Car speeds should be reduced throughout the precinct.

6. Cycleways

The proposed cycleways need to be improved to reduce the reliance on cars in the area. Better cycleway connections - ensuring paths don't end randomly - and separation from main roads - particularly Hannell Street - will improve safety and reliability.

The plan should include bicycle hire locations and bicycle paths on every street.

7. Pedestrians

The plan needs to be more pedestrian friendly, with a greater emphasis on pedestrians' needs rather than on cars and parking. This will be improved by:

- Improved pedestrian access and traffic calming to the foreshore
- Improved pedestrian connections to Throsby Creek
- Access routes between Wickham Park and the Throsby city link foreshore
- Pedestrian overpasses on busy roads
- Priority for foot traffic on dedicated bike paths
- Increased signage with directions to main streets, ovals and train stations
- Creating a safe and easy connection to sailing club/foreshore across Hannell Street

Pedestrian links across Hannell Street also need to be greatly improved, particularly when the old Bullocks Island Railway route is zoned to become a public landscape corridor that will see pedestrian traffic emptying out at one of the busiest roundabouts in Newcastle.

8. Community Facilities and Character

Wickham Park and 'Tree of Knowledge' Park should be improved to be 'destination' places with good landscaping and multi-use spaces.

The character of Wickham Village needs to be maintained by retaining existing terraces and houses of value to the street and enhanced with more playgrounds and gardens.

Green areas are needed on the streets connecting Wickham Park with the harbour edge.

We propose linking Wickham Park to Wickham Village by extending Church Street to the park. This could be achieved by a land swap that would benefit the affected landowners and the city.

9. Schools

Population growth will create the need to expand local school sizes in the precinct.

The old school is central to the Wickham Village identity and is heritage listed, but it has been converted into student housing; it should be reclaimed for school use.

New schools could be accommodated on Rail Corporation NSW land.