

## Questions Asked in Workshop 3: Adamstown Club, 18 May 2011

### 1 Hunter Street Revitalisation

**Q1:** Why is Hunter Street considered so important? Which projects will act as catalysts to revitalise the central business district?

**Answer:** Hunter Street is identified as the highest priority project for Council in the Four Year Delivery Program as this street is central to the entire city's revitalisation – as identified by the community and council for many years. Hunter Street revitalisation or any city centre renewal project is fundamental to achieving enduring revitalisation outcomes. Attracting investment is a priority driver in delivering economic stability and activation of the city centre - and the local government area as a whole. Current negotiations for GPT's sale of its large consolidated parcel of land are underway – and Council will work with the new owner to explore opportunities to develop assets in the future. Council is working towards a comprehensive asset acquisition, management and disposal policy at this time.

**Q2:** How will Council value under-used buildings in the city? How are these valuations done and how will you manage that over time? We're not interested in fire sales.

**Answer:** Market valuations determine the value of any assets in the city at any time – which includes Council assets and those owned by private developers. Managing this is a function of the desirability of any parcel of land, or buildings, at any time. A recent successful example was the sale of some unused land in Minmi to Bunnings – a new store will lead to millions in development and the creation of 100 jobs.

**Q3:** Is something going to happen with the Post Office?

The Post Office building was bought by the state government in 2009 (from a private developer who had bought it from the federal government), and is seeking a range of investment options to secure its future.

### 2 Priority of Works

**Q1:** What if Council does not manage to sell some of its under-utilised assets (or if the elected Council does not approve their being placed on the market), what happens to the options then?

**Answer:** If assets can not be rationalised, it reduces the funds available for investment in some of the major projects identified in the four options – and they will be removed from the bottom of the list. The projects are listed in priority order within the four options.

**Q2:** I see that there are proposed new libraries in Stockton and Beresfield – yet both these suburbs are close to neighbouring council areas. We'll invest in new facilities, and their ratepayers will benefit. Why wouldn't we build a new library near the Tighes Hill TAFE instead – to serve Mayfield and its surrounding suburbs, and also reduce anti-social behaviour along Maitland Road?

This will be the subject of further discussions – as each of the major projects proposed will require more detailed planning. Library use has changed and council is already adapting to these changes with the construction of the Wallsend Library. It has gained an increase in visitation of 161% on the old Wallsend Library, and we would hope to meet community expectations in the same way at the next new library/community facility constructed.

## 3 Funding Options

Q1. What are the proportion of federal funds coming in to Newcastle? Why does this region not attract more federal funds?

**Answer:** The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) was met with a federal stimulus package to all households around the country, and also with the Building the Education Revolution (BER) schools construction program. These initiatives limit future stimulus funding.

Q2. The base budget for Maintenance rises in each of the four funding options. Why?

As projects proposed are funded, funds are taken from reserves and moved into operational funds (the top line of the four funding options) – more assets require more annual maintenance.

Q2. What percentage of Council's total income is generated by rates?

**Answer:** In Newcastle rates make up 54% of Council's total income. The balance is sourced from fees and charges for a range of services - and state and federal government grants for specific activities.

Q3. If major changes are not possible to generate income from Blackbutt Reserve, could coffee vans offer a temporary source of revenue to Council – and coffee for visitors?

This is an option being explored at present – and must fit within the current Bushland Plan of Management for Blackbutt Reserve.

Q4. People in public housing don't pay rates, where's the equity in that?

Housing NSW, a state government department, pays the rates on these properties to Council on the tenants' behalf – as landlords of these properties. Housing has become very tight in New South Wales, and Council has responded by offering rates deferment options for pensioners in areas with increasing land values.

Q2. Why should ratepayers pay for the Civic Theatre?

**Answer:** Many local governments own major assets which can be a source of revenue – the Civic Theatre is one of these in Newcastle. The Commercial Enterprise Services unit is charged with ensuring that all its assets are maintained to an acceptable standard, and that the burden on ratepayers is minimised as these facilities are able to generate a better return.

Q5. How can Council increase revenue from non-ratepayers? The Fees and Charges should be much higher for all council assets, eg entry to the new museum should be \$25.

Every council must strike a balance between providing major assets for its citizens and visitors to enjoy – and maintenance of existing assets. This balance is struck each year with the Operational Plan, with substantial changes made to fees and charges over the past two years. The increases to fees (such as pool entries) must bear some relation to the value of the facilities, as usage would otherwise drop, reducing overall income.

## Parking and Transport

**Q1.** What is being done about congestion right around Westfield Kotara?. Dibbs St, Lexington?

**Answer:** There has been a comprehensive traffic and parking study conducted since the expansion of Westfield Kotara. The results of this study – and Council's recommendations to manage both parking and traffic – are the subject of a community workshop to be held on 8 June 2011 at the St James Hall, Vista Parade, Kotara (opposite St Philips College).

**Q2.** What options do we have to reduce cars into the city? In Subiaco Council, parking charges vary during the day as parking availability changes. In New York City, there's an iPhone application for vacant car spaces in a few city blocks.

This is part of the consideration of Council's long-term parking strategy. When people ask Council for more parking, they mean more free parking. Yet this is exactly counter-productive in a city where commuters are currently taking valuable street parking spaces rather than parking in existing parking stations.