

BUSINESS HUNTER

WILLIAMTOWN SPECIAL ACTIVATION PRECINCT DRAFT MASTER PLAN 2041

Business Hunter Submission

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Introduction

Business Hunter (formerly the Hunter Business Chamber) appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback on the Williamstown Special Activation Precinct (SAP) Draft Master Plan.

Business Hunter is the Hunter Region's peak business policy and advocacy group, representing more than 3,700 member and affiliate businesses and industries across all sectors, from SMEs to large corporations and organisations. We are connected to the business community statewide and nationally through affiliations with Business NSW (BNSW) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI). Furthermore, Business Hunter is networked and affiliated with 20 local Chambers of Commerce across the Hunter region further enhancing our reach, connectivity and engagement with the business sector.

We believe our role is vital to help Hunter businesses succeed through championing comprehensive government and private enterprise policies that make room for entrepreneurialism, growth and diversification of modern Hunter businesses who have faced extraordinary challenges over the past two or three years. Through providing open access to business policy, thought leadership and strong advocacy we know we can assist in positioning this region for prosperity, to strengthen existing and generate new jobs, social wealth, and a better community in which to live.

We were pleased to host leaders from the Williamstown SAP planning team at the April Business Hunter Regional Infrastructure Committee, who were extremely grateful to have direct opportunity to understand the process of consultation, and gain insight to the positioning of the Draft Master Plan. This submission by Business Hunter takes into consideration feedback and additional consultation undertaken by our organisation following that briefing and is submitted on behalf of our Members.

General Feedback

Business Hunter is aware of the long pathway taken for the SAP to arrive at this point. Over many years, we have closely followed the planning, growth and development intentions on and around Newcastle Airport, which forms a large part of the SAP area. Business Hunter was also a supporter of the SAP being declared and realise the enormous potential and genuine benefit that can materialise if we get the plan right knowing it will be a significant attractor for future investment.

The economic context of the SAP is profound for the development of emerging, growing and established businesses and industries for the Hunter. It is one of a handful of truly cornerstone development Precincts in the pipeline for this region. For the purposes of economic development, it sits alongside other significant state developments such as the John Hunter Health and Innovation Precinct (JHHIP), the establishment and development of the Hunter Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), and complements federally-backed industrial precinct investments, such as the H2 Hydrogen Hub at the Port of Newcastle and the Trailblazers Innovation Precinct; a collaboration between the University of Newcastle and the University of New South Wales.

On this point, Business Hunter positions its submission as a series of consolidating recommendations that continued state planning and delivery of the Williamstown SAP be viewed as an economic enabler. This is important not only in our post-COVID recovery and regrowth in industry that, if delivered successfully, will reap benefits for the whole of the north and northwest of NSW; it will also contribute significantly towards the move to build defence, manufacturing, innovation and commercialisation capability for Australia. Harnessing the potential of the Precinct model, just like the JHHIP and the HCCREZ, will also shore-up the diversification of our region of business and

economic growth as other traditional economic drivers, such as coal mining, begin their journey as a sunsetting industry over the next decades.

Comprehensive, aligned design thinking, strategic funding, and efficient delivery of the Williamstown SAP must remain core priorities for the NSW Government over the next several budgets to ensure momentum remains and the full return on investment can be realised through full uptake and activation of the Precinct.

Business Hunter believes government achieves best policy outcomes for regional development when its strategies, plans and documents cross-reference related works in other agencies.

Business Hunter has always contended that the Williamstown precinct and now the SAP area needs to be planned and developed in such a manner that the focus is almost entirely drawn from the pillars that will support it, derived from principally from the aerospace and defence industry stemming from the RAAF base Williamstown, the Newcastle Airport and the Astro Aerolab activity. The development imperatives must therefore be patient over the long term to ensure the region has a capacity to attract and deliver projects and initiatives within this purpose. It is not considered acceptable to have the area occupied for example, with urban services or bulky good retailing style development.

Similarly, to the principal of land around the port of Newcastle being dedicated for port related uses, the theme through the SAP needs to reflect aerospace and defence as the prime purpose. This still permits scope for innovation, lead and advanced manufacturing projects which are hoped will materialise as the region grows.

Resoundingly, it is the view of the business communities we regularly interact with, that the Williamstown SAP must be delivered to enhance and complement and not compete with the commercial objectives of the sub-region within which it is situated. This is particularly relevant to the commercial activity attracted through the Newcastle Airport and adjacent aerospace industrial precinct, the RAAF base Williamstown, as well as neighbouring commercial and industrial centres in Tomago, Heatherbrae and business districts across the lower wards of the Port Stephens local government area. It is promising to see some reference to this objective weaved through the pages of the Draft Master Plan. Business Hunter reaffirms the importance of carrying through business and commercial consultation in any plans to ensure this enhancement is realised.

We congratulate the Department of Regional NSW in its comprehensive consideration of First Nation heritage conservation and their empowerment to contribute to the core objectives and design of the Williamstown SAP Precinct Draft Master Plan that seek to foster connection with Country, retention of culturally significant site features, and enhanced opportunities to promote indigenous participation in the SAP outcomes through employment, training and personal growth underpinned by a celebration of heritage.

Feedback related to Sections within the Draft Masterplan

Section Four: Provisions of the Master Plan

1. In previous representations on the Williamstown SAP, Business Hunter has represented that the site must steer away from including any form of residential development in the Precinct or surrounds. This exclusion is referenced in item 4.1.1 of the Draft Master Plan, and Business Hunter recommends embedding this reference as a planning principle ongoing. The potential for conflict at any land use interface with residential development as well as more broadly, concerning noise generation and the strong likelihood of 24/7 industrial and commercial activity does not warrant the grief that is likely to arise from the positioning of residential activity within the

SAP. This restriction is exclusive of accommodation that will support the airport and industrial area in the form of hotels and similar style venues.

2. Item 4.2.1 deals with the consideration of future stages of development relating to retail offerings on the site. Business Hunter notes opportunities for appropriately curated retail spaces included in industrial development and supports the recommendation in 4.2.1 that the Precinct retail intake does not fragment the existing commercial centres within Port Stephens. Any retail component should be developed in the context of the SAP generated need only and not merge into broader uses that rely on trade area support well beyond the SAP defined area.

We further reinforce our opening remarks that this be broadened to specify no retail fragmentation that may impact the retail intake in the Newcastle Airport terminals (current and planned), retail support in Tomago commercial and industrial zones, or ecotourism offerings with an existing front of house offsite from the Williamstown SAP retail zone. It is recommended that the Final Master Plan include provisions for preservation of existing commercial and retail assets in the region that might be adversely impacted by the retail services included in the Williamstown SAP.

Section Five: Environment and Sustainability

Business Hunter has developed a strong understanding in recent years of the adverse impacts on businesses that are felt through the disruption and devastation resulting from a seeming increase in adverse environmental conditions and natural disasters that have been occurring. The Williamstown SAP Draft Master Plan takes a broad and comprehensive view of environmental and sustainability measures, yet Business Hunter recommends some specific parameters be embedded within the Final Master Plan that may further preserve, specifically, business and commercial continuity for tenants within the SAP.

1. 5.11 outlines Performance Criteria and Considerations for future stages of development related to Flood Risk Management. Alongside the existing measures, Business Hunter recommends a performance criteria and consideration be added that states the Final Master Plan will continually consider plans that preserve the operational integrity of the Newcastle Airport, the RAAF and tenant businesses by ensuring flood risk and mitigation plans actively seek to divert risk and impact of flooding events away from the tenancies and support safe continuation of operation where it is safe for operational staff to continue service. Given the apparent flood profile of the site, and the studies undertaken to understand this, there should be clear prioritization of commercial preservation of these operations at all safe costs.
2. Business Hunter further understands the rising costs of insurance as a result of the natural disasters and adverse weather events that have occurred along the Eastern Seaboard and recommends that insurance risk assessments for flood be conducted by DRNSW as part of the commercial and retail preparedness component of the Master Plan to ensure the SAP Precinct and planning accommodates insurance risk for business. We recommend same for bushfire (5.12) and Climate Change (5.13), to provide comprehensive comfort to business from the outset that costs of insurance to operate businesses on this Precinct, in consideration of its landscape profile, have been measured.

Conclusion

Business Hunter regards the SAP as a vital piece in the regional puzzle with the capacity to add and build on significant economic pillars to the regional and State economy. It is critical we believe it stays true to purpose and note the delivery of the elements in the SAP across infrastructure and planning will be a long term game.

It is vitally important this theme be maintained and short term imperatives to not distract or interfere with delivery of the long term goals the SAP seeks to achieve.

Business Hunter would welcome further engagement and consultation on this submission, particularly relating to its practical implementation and the prioritisation of delivery across the Objectives.

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