Building Newcastle's Future: Priority Projects

2026/2027



City of Newcastle

Newcastle Electorate

Acknowledgement of Country

We all sit on Awabakal and Worimi land.

The City of Newcastle (CN) acknowledges its Local Government Area (LGA) sits within the Country of the Awabakal and the Worimi peoples. We Acknowledge that Country for Aboriginal peoples is an interconnected set of ancient relationships. CN acknowledges the custodianship of the Awabakal and Worimi peoples and the care and stewardship they have performed in this place since time immemorial.

Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.



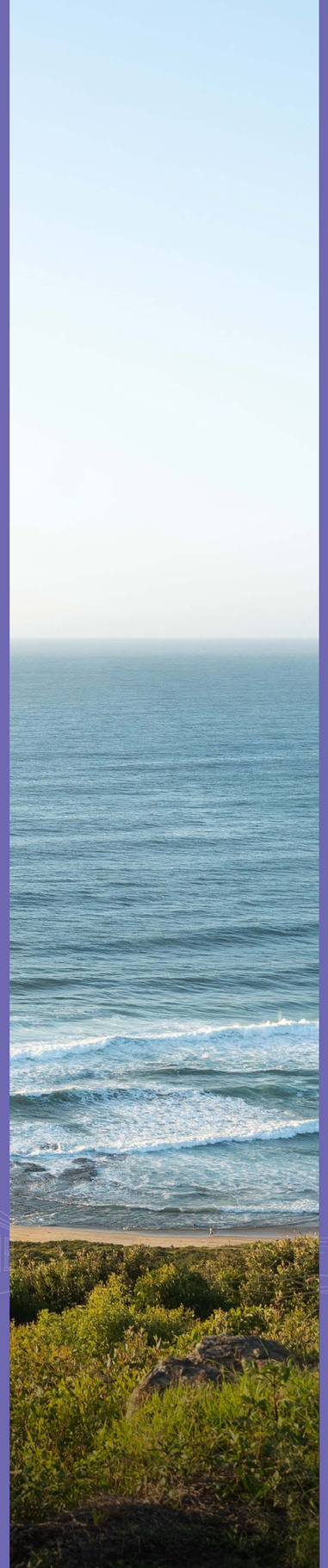
Enquiries

For information about this document contact:

City of Newcastle
PO Box 489, Newcastle NSW 2300
newcastle.nsw.gov.au

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Cover image: Merewether Beach

Strategic Alignment

Newcastle is a liveable, sustainable, inclusive global city.



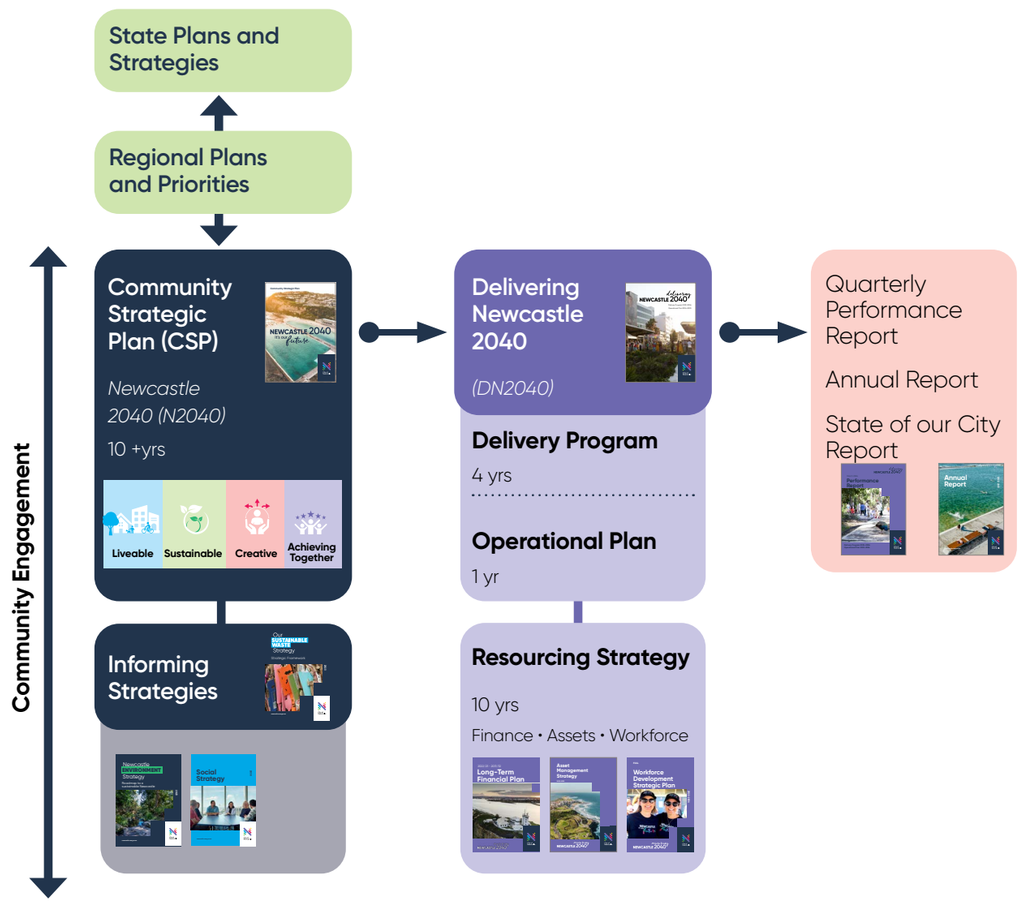
Merewether Ocean Baths

Strategic Alignment of Priority Projects

City of Newcastle's priority projects are informed by *Newcastle 2040*, our Community Strategic Plan, that outlines the community's vision for Newcastle as a liveable, sustainable, inclusive global city. Through the NSW Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework, Council translates this vision into long-term planning, infrastructure investment and service delivery.

Newcastle 2040 is supported by a suite of strategies and plans aligned with key regional and state strategies, including the *Hunter Regional Plan 2041* and *Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036*. Together, these documents provide a clear line of sight from community aspirations to the projects and investments needed to support Newcastle's future.

The framework below demonstrates how state and regional priorities inform City of Newcastle's strategic direction and priority projects, supporting delivery of the community's vision for Newcastle.



Merewether SLSC Redevelopment

1

Ask

Provide funding of $10 million NSW Government co-contribution towards the redevelopment of Merewether Surf Life Saving Club, consistent with the NSW Government's recent $10 million commitment announced towards the redevelopment of North Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club.

This investment would help deliver a contemporary, fit-for-purpose facility for one of Australia's oldest and most active surf lifesaving clubs, strengthening frontline volunteer lifesaving and emergency response capability, water safety, accessibility and community use for future generations.

Background

Merewether Surf Life Saving Club (MSLSC) has provided patrolled surf lifesaving services since 1907 and is one of Australia's oldest and most active surf lifesaving clubs. Widely recognised as a critical community asset, with approximately 890 members, the Club delivers frontline public safety, rescue and emergency response services at one of NSW's most iconic coastal destinations.

In 2025/26, 186 registered patrolling members contributed 6,003 volunteer patrol hours, undertaking 1,414 preventative actions, 23 first-aid responses and six rescues. A total of 105 members achieved 100% patrol attendance, demonstrating the significant and sustained volunteer commitment underpinning beach safety at Merewether. These frontline activities are complemented by emergency response services extending beyond traditional beach patrols, including responses to aquatic emergencies, medical incidents, flooding and missing-person searches.

Located within the Merewether National Surfing Reserve, MSLSC supports one of NSW's premier surfing and visitor destinations. Merewether Beach is home to Newcastle Surfest, Australia's largest and longest-running surfing festival, and hosts World Surf League (WSL) Challenger Series events that attract elite international competitors, thousands of spectators and a global digital audience exceeding 3 million viewers. The Club therefore provides essential public-safety and operational infrastructure supporting major events, tourism and recreation while contributing to Newcastle's reputation as an internationally recognised surfing destination.

Surf life saving clubs are an integral part of NSW's coastal communities, contributing to coastal safety, community education, volunteer participation, social connection, youth development and healthy, active lifestyles. They provide essential volunteer-led services, including beach patrols, emergency response, water safety education and community engagement activities, which reduce pressure on emergency services and support safe and accessible beaches.

These services operate in partnership with City of Newcastle's professional lifeguard service, whose highly skilled staff work alongside volunteer surf lifesavers in a way that is fundamental to community safety and Newcastle's identity. In 2025/26, approximately 2.95 million visits were recorded across Newcastle's six beaches and two ocean baths, demonstrating the scale of the coastal public-safety task supported by City of Newcastle's professional lifeguards and Newcastle's volunteer surf lifesaving clubs.

A redevelopment is now required to address significant operational, accessibility and capacity limitations of the existing Club facility. The current two-storey masonry and concrete clubhouse is more than 50 years old and no longer meets contemporary lifesaving, community or inclusion requirements.

The building lacks accessible access to the upper level and accessible amenities, contains inadequate changeroom and storage facilities, experiences circulation and operational conflicts between club and kiosk functions, relies on off-site storage and provides limited training and community space. These limitations reduce the Club's operational effectiveness and constrain its ability to accommodate increasing membership, growing Nipper participation and contemporary community expectations.

Demand for Club services and participation continues to place pressure on the existing facility. Nipper participation exceeded the program cap in 2024/25, reaching 336 children against a program cap of 320, and increased further to around 380 Juniors in 2025/26.

The building's condition and significant accessibility and operational constraints demonstrate that it can no longer meet current or future service requirements. A comprehensive redevelopment is required to deliver a durable, inclusive and fit-for-purpose facility capable of supporting lifesaving operations, community use and future growth.

Investment in surf lifesaving infrastructure is critical to ensuring the Club, together with City of Newcastle, can continue delivering these essential community safety services.

A MSLSC Redevelopment Stakeholder Reference Group and Project Control Group have been established to oversee planning and design development, ensuring strong governance arrangements and project readiness as funding opportunities become available.

The funding sought is a $10 million NSW Government co-contribution towards an estimated $30 million redevelopment project. Consistent with the NSW Government's recent commitment to North Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club, this investment would provide the critical funding catalyst required to progress delivery of a modern surf lifesaving facility that will serve the Newcastle and Hunter communities for decades to come.

The proposed redevelopment is supported as a priority project by NSW Surf Life Saving (see letter attached).



Merewether SLSC

Benefits to the NSW State Government

Surf lifesaving clubs, volunteer surf lifesavers and professional lifeguards deliver significant public and economic value through frontline public safety and rescue, emergency and disaster response, reduced pressure on health and emergency services, support for the visitor economy, and improved community health, inclusion and resilience.

Merewether SLSC supports one of NSW's most significant surfing and visitor destinations. Through its role supporting Surfest, World Surf League events and year-round visitation to the Merewether coastline, the Club contributes directly to the NSW Government's objectives under the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2035, including the goal of increasing visitor expenditure from $52 billion to $91 billion by 2035.

Specifically, investment in the redevelopment would deliver direct State outcomes through:

- strengthened frontline drowning prevention, rescue and emergency-response capability
- modern facilities to support the recruitment, training and retention of a substantial volunteer lifesaving workforce
- increased capacity for Nippers, water-safety education and recognised lifesaving qualifications
- reduced pressure on police, ambulance and other emergency and health services through prevention and early intervention
- improved community resilience and emergency-response capability
- more inclusive and accessible facilities supporting participation across the community
- support for youth development, volunteerism, physical activity and community wellbeing
- delivery of an environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient facility
- support for Newcastle's visitor economy and major-event capability at one of NSW's nationally recognised surfing destinations.
- enhanced infrastructure supporting regional tourism growth

Beyond public-safety outcomes, the redevelopment would strengthen the infrastructure supporting major events, tourism, jobs and economic activity across Newcastle and the Hunter region while ensuring the volunteer lifesaving capability underpinning these activities remains sustainable into the future.

Benefits to the Newcastle State Electorate and Hunter Region

Surf life saving clubs and professional lifeguard services provide several key benefits to local and regional communities through public safety and drowning prevention, community resilience and social cohesion, youth leadership and development, inclusivity and accessibility and local infrastructure and economic activity.

The project also reflects broader priorities identified for the Newcastle electorate through the NSW Government's Community Building Partnership process, including support for community organisations, active and healthy lifestyles, youth participation and resilient community infrastructure.

It is also consistent with the NSW Government's ongoing commitment to supporting the upgrade of local Surf Life Saving Clubs and its recognition of their critical role in delivering on-beach safety, training and education, and keeping communities active and connected.

For Newcastle, the redevelopment would protect and enhance an established community facility serving members, families, beach users and visitors while strengthening the infrastructure supporting one of the city's most heavily used coastal destinations. The project would also deliver a modern, inclusive, environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient facility capable of meeting future community, emergency response and operational needs.

Merewether Beach's status as a National Surfing Reserve and the home of Surfest and World Surf League competition further extends the value of the facility beyond the local community, supporting Newcastle's profile as a major sporting and visitor destination. The 2026 Surfest program involved more than 800 competitors from across Australia and overseas participating in nine events. In 2025, Surfest attracted approximately 3.2 million live digital viewers and more than 50 million social media impressions, showcasing Newcastle as a tourism destination to an international audience.

Merewether SLSC's regional role also extends beyond Merewether through support for neighbouring clubs, including patrol assistance to Tea Gardens Hawks Nest SLSC, and participation in flood response and multi-agency search-and-rescue training.



Merewether Beach 2022



Merewether Beach (c.1950s). Courtesy of the Newcastle & Hunter District Historical Society Archives, University of Newcastle (Australia)

Alignment with State and Local Priorities, Strategies and Initiatives

NSW Surf Club Facility Program 2026-27

Office of Sport Strategic Plan 2024-2028

NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2035

State Disaster Mitigation Plan 2024 (SDMP)

Destination Sydney Surrounds North Destination Management Plan (DMP) 2022-2030

Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW) Strategic Plan 2025-2030

City of Newcastle Community Strategic Plan (Newcastle 2040)

***Newcastle 2040* Strategic Alignment:**

1. Liveable Newcastle

1.1 Enriched neighbourhoods and places

No.1 Sportsground Stage 2 Upgrade

2

Ask

Provide funding of $15 million to deliver critical upgrades at Newcastle No.1 Sportsground including player and official facilities, accessible spectator amenities, and media infrastructure to enable the venue to meet first-class sporting standards and restore elite men's and women's competition to the Hunter region.

Background

Newcastle's No.1 Sportsground is one of the city's most important and historic multi-sport venues, playing a central role in elite, representative, and community sport across the Hunter region. The multi-sport venue plays a pivotal role in the wider Hunter sporting community, as the region's premier AFL and cricket facility, hosting elite, representative and community competition, talent pathways and major sporting events.

Cricket NSW and AFL NSW have consistently recognised the strategic importance of No.1 Sportsground in supporting regional participation, talent development and the delivery of elite sporting content outside metropolitan Sydney, advocating for ongoing investment to maintain the venue's role as a premier regional sports facility.

As NSW's second-largest city, Newcastle relies on No.1 Sportsground as a flagship venue to provide equitable access to elite sport, supports women's and junior competitions, whilst underpinning the region's sporting economy. Ageing facilities are constraining the venue's ability to meet contemporary standards for athletes, officials, spectators, as well as limiting the capacity of the venue to host major and elite level events.

Targeted investment is essential to protect and enhance No.1 Sportsground's role as a premier regional sporting asset and ensure Newcastle continues to deliver strong participation, talent development, and economic outcomes through sport. Stage 1 upgrade works at Newcastle's No.1 Sportsground were funded by City of Newcastle in 2022 at a cost of $10 million.

Benefits to the NSW State Government

Investment in Newcastle No.1 Sportsground will restore access to elite sports competition in NSW's second-largest city, addressing regional equity and supporting state priorities for participation, talent pathways, and gender balance beyond Greater Sydney.

As the Hunter's premier oval sporting venue, No.1 Sportsground plays a critical role in supporting the growth of cricket and AFL, with no equivalent oval facility currently planned within the Broadmeadow precinct.

Upgrading No.1 Sportsground will enable Newcastle to host first-class sporting events, driving visitation, overnight stays, and local expenditure while strengthening the Hunter's contribution to the NSW visitor and events economy.

Targeted upgrades will also protect and future-proof a high-profile regional sporting asset, improve safety, accessibility, whilst extending asset life and reducing long-term maintenance and replacement costs.

Investment in Newcastle No.1 Sportsground will ensure NSW retains the capacity to host elite cricket and AFL competition and pathway programs outside metropolitan Sydney, as well as supporting the continued decentralisation of major sporting opportunities across the State.

Benefits to the Newcastle State Electorate and Hunter Region

Upgrades to No.1 Sportsground will restore regular access to elite men's and women's AFL and cricket competitions by allowing local communities to experience first-class sport close to home. Upgrades will also strengthen regional pride, visibility and aspirations for young athletes pursuing representative and elite sporting pathways outside metropolitan Sydney.

Major sporting events drive increased visitation, accommodation demand, hospitality spending, and event-related employment. This all contributes to the delivery of tangible economic benefits to Newcastle and its surrounding Hunter communities. The project also aligns with the published Electoral District Priorities for Newcastle.

Improved facilities support junior, women, and community participation in AFL and cricket, as well as strengthening talent pathways, inclusion, and health outcomes. Upgrades to No.1 Sportsground will ensure the venue continues to serve as a high-quality, accessible community asset for the region.

Aligns with the following State and Local Strategies and Plans

NSW Sport Infrastructure Strategy

NSW Office of Sport Strategic Plan 2024-2028

NSW Major Events Strategy

Hunter Regional Plan 2041

Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036

Destination Sydney Surrounds North Destination Management Plan (DMP) 2022-2030

City of Newcastle Strategic Sports Plan 2020-2030

City of Newcastle Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026

City of Newcastle Community Strategic Plan (Newcastle 2040)

City of Newcastle Delivering Newcastle 2040 (2026/27 Operational Plan)

***Newcastle 2040* Strategic Alignment:**
1. Creative Newcastle
1.1 Connected and fair communities



No.1 Sportsground

Entertainment and Conference Centre Broadmeadow Precinct

3

Ask

Commit $485 million towards the construction of Newcastle Arena, a new 12,000-seat entertainment and conference centre at Broadmeadow, as the first major catalyst project of the Broadmeadow Place Strategy, delivered in partnership with Venues NSW.

Background

The NSW Government has committed $14.95 million to complete the detailed design of Newcastle Arena. The proposed 12,000-seat Entertainment and Conference Centre is a priority project within the Broadmeadow Place Strategy and a catalyst for the staged delivery of the Hunter Park Precinct. Delivery of the Newcastle Arena strengthens the region's capacity to attract major events, support professional sport and drive economic growth.

Newcastle currently lacks a contemporary, regionally significant entertainment and conference centre capable of hosting national-scale events, major sporting and cultural attractions, and large business and community expos. This capacity constraint limits visitor economy growth and the activation of strategically located government-owned land at Broadmeadow.

The Newcastle Arena is intended as Stage 1 of the Broadmeadow Place Strategy, anchoring Hunter Park and enabling subsequent stages including housing, sport and aquatic facilities, public domain upgrades, and supporting infrastructure. Together, these investments will transform Broadmeadow into a nationally significant sport, entertainment, and mixed-use precinct supported by strong transport connectivity and alignment with state and regional growth priorities.

Benefits to the NSW State Government

Delivers a regionally significant entertainment and conference centre that expands NSW's major events and business tourism capacity beyond Sydney, directly supporting the NSW Visitor Economy and Major Events strategies while strengthening statewide economic resilience.

Drives immediate construction employment and long-term jobs across tourism, hospitality, creative industries, and event services, while maximising the value, utilisation, and financial sustainability of Venues NSW land through a contemporary, high-activation asset.

Enables staged delivery of the Broadmeadow Place Strategy, unlocking housing, including affordable housing, productivity-focused urban renewal, and efficient use of existing transport infrastructure in NSW's second-largest city.

Benefits to the Newcastle State Electorate and Hunter Region

Positions Newcastle as a leading regional destination for major events, conferences, and entertainment, generating sustained visitation, higher local spend, and flow-on benefits for accommodation, hospitality, transport, and local businesses while supporting the published Electoral District Priorities for Newcastle.

Anchors Hunter Park with a high-impact civic facility that drives private investment, improves land-use outcomes, and accelerates delivery of housing, sport, aquatic, transport, and community infrastructure across the Broadmeadow Precinct.

Once complete, the precinct will support long-term employment growth, improved liveability, and delivery of diverse and affordable housing in a highly connected location minutes from the CBD, strengthening Newcastle's role as a thriving regional city.

Aligns with the following State and Local Strategies and Plans

NSW Visitor Economy Strategy

NSW Major Events Strategy

Hunter Regional Plan 2041

Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036

Housing 2041 – NSW Housing Strategy

State Infrastructure Strategy 2018–2038

NSW Government Property Framework

Rezoning Pathways Program

NSW 24-Hour Economy Strategy (Uplifting the 24-Hour Economy)

Broadmeadow Place Strategy

City of Newcastle Community Strategic Plan (Newcastle 2040)

City of Newcastle Cultural Plan 2026-2036

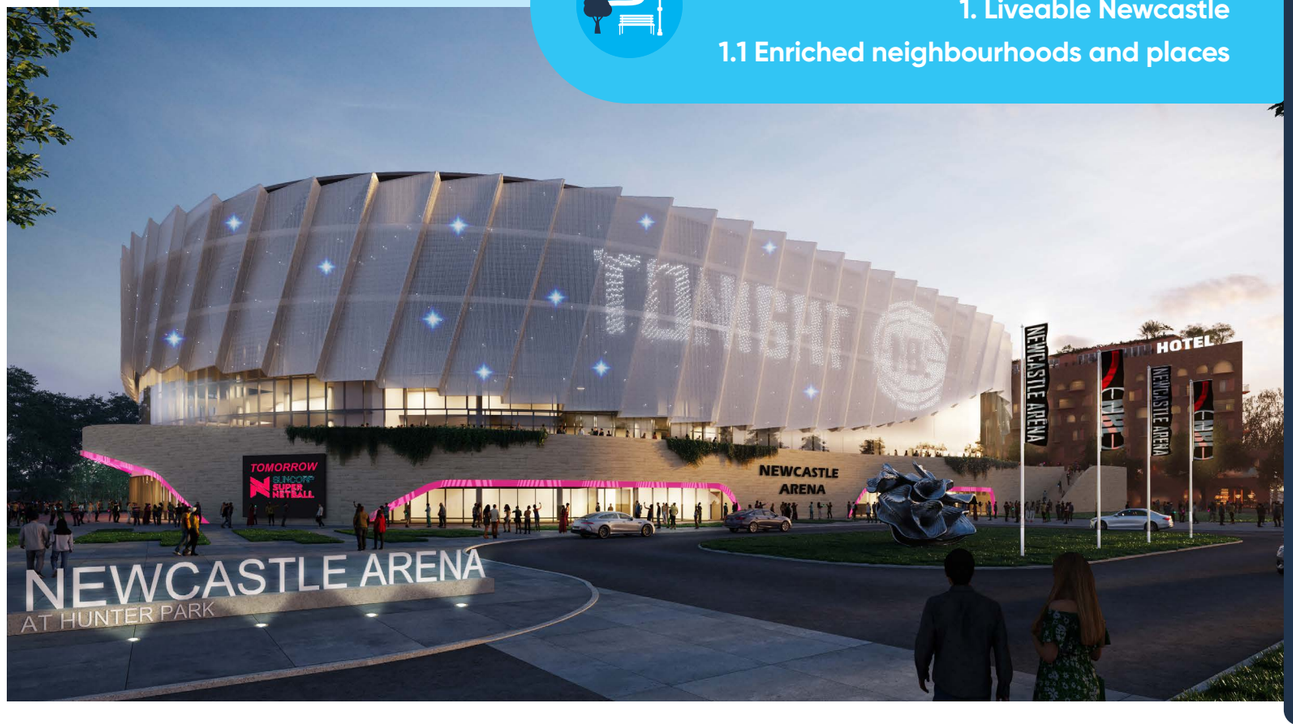
City of Newcastle Draft City Vibrancy Strategy (future draft)

City of Newcastle Delivering Newcastle 2040 (2026/27 Operational Plan)

***Newcastle 2040* Strategic Alignment:**

1. Liveable Newcastle

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Concept design for the proposed Newcastle Arena

newcastle.nsw.gov.au