SUBMISSION

TO

ROADS & MARITIME SERVICES

SCONE NEW ENGLAND HIGHWAY BYPASS AND RAIL OVERPASS

FROM

UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL

February 2016
Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the draft concept design and environmental assessment for the New England Highway bypass of Scone and rail overpass. Council supports the concept of a bypass and rail overpass but cannot support the current RMS concept plans in their current form.

Council’s resolution in September 2013 was:

That Council:

1. Oppose the RMS Scone Bypass plan with a design speed of 100kph provided to Council on the 13 September 2013.
2. In consultation with the RMS and key stakeholders further develop and advocate the preferred solutions of the dual rail overpasses option in Kelly Street and an 80kph bypass alignment.
3. Engage with the local community, state and federal members in direct opposition to the new plan should RMS continue to advocate the full 100kph bypass option as detailed in the RMS plan provided on 13 September 2013.

Council has maintained this position right throughout the process and discussions. RMS has been made aware of this at every meeting including the various value adding workshops. Council has however continued to work with RMS to ensure that the funding for this project was secured and there was general agreement that designs would be considered once this was confirmed.

Council’s number one concern has always been the blockage of the rail line and we have provided submissions to relevant agencies as far back as 2007. RMS has provided some options that attempted to resolve this issue when it released its “Scone Level Crossing Options and Feasibility Study” in 2012. Council provided a response to this stating that the key issue is and still remains unobstructed access across the rail line.

In 2013 the revised RMS plans were discussed with Council staff. We are however not aware of any other consultation RMS has had with other key stakeholders which RMS advised would be undertaken. This has been confirmed by agencies such as the Emergency Services in their submission on the proposal. It is acknowledged that RMS has continued to meet with Council about the project, but as mentioned above this was to ensure that the funding for the project was secured. At each meeting we have been clear about our position and that the current proposal does not reflect those discussions.

The most recent proposal which shows a lack of connectivity onto and off the bypass at the southern and northern ends of Scone respectively, demonstrates RMS putting forward an option without Council knowledge or any discussion.

Council is very concerned about a number of issues in the concept plans and environmental review and does not support the designs in their current form. Council has undertaken its own consultation with key stakeholders including emergency services, and has had many conversations with individuals prior to and since the release of the current proposal. It is fair to say there is little support for the proposal as it stands. Council’s concerns are set out in Appendix A, with the major issues being:

1. Proposal Objectives

The concept plans do not meet all the proposal objectives, including:

a) Unimpeded access for Emergency Services: Emergency Services have already identified in their submission “Should a closure of both level crossings occur prior to the completion of a suitable overpass, the current design would require emergency vehicles to travel south through town and contra-flow on the southern exit arm, negotiate south bound traffic travelling at 100 km/h, climb what appears to be a raised median, then travel north again to enter town via the proposed St Aubins Street ramp. Alternatively emergency vehicles would have to travel further south on the highway and conduct a u-turn to get back to town”.

Council agrees with the Emergency Services’ position that this does not meet the objectives of unimpeded access

b) Improved urban amenity in Scone: Council fails to see how the current proposal would improve urban amenity given that heavy vehicles will still have to travel through the township to access facilities such as the Saleyards and Abattoir. There are also the environmental factors such as noise, privacy and the visual impacts that will have a lasting negative impact on the township. This objective has not been
achieved. Appendix A lists the positive and negative environmental impacts, and it is clear that the negatives outweigh the positives.

Council also understands that RMS has received other submissions that demonstrate that the proposal does not meet some of RMS’s own policies for infrastructure in rural areas or urban design.

2. Lack of Connectivity & Speed

The lack of connectivity with the bypass to enable vehicles to utilise the bypass at the north and south end of town is unacceptable. Council provided options to the RMS, which although RMS have stated that these issues have been considered, no evidence of this has been provided other than verbal presentations at liaison meetings.

Council recommends that roundabouts are installed at the northern and southern connections to Scone. If designed correctly this type of treatment provides adequate access and allows vehicles time to slow sufficiently and safely navigate through the intersections.

Further consideration should also be given to the placement of any intersection at the northern end of the township and connectivity with the industrial estate. Council believes that there is an opportunity to enable heavy vehicles to navigate the rail line at this point to service the saleyards and abattoir. This would also ensure heavy vehicle traffic would remain out of the Scone CBD. An additional benefit to this would be the likely activation of the industrial estate and the creation of a connection to the Muffet Street industrial precinct.

Council understands that the connection at St Aubins Street was implemented to satisfy a request from Council that a connection needed to be made for vehicles heading to and from the west. However the proposed design is complicated for drivers, has negative impacts on residents and Council, along with emergency services, believe it is unsafe. Council considers that a controlled intersection with Liverpool Street as originally proposed is the preferred option. We understand that there are implications with flood studies but RMS should be attempting to overcome this with a better solution than the one offered.

Council along with other stakeholders believe that the 100kph speed limit for the bypass is too high and as per Council’s resolution that the speed limit of 80kph should be implemented. A lower speed would allow the appropriate connections to be made at the north, south and western entry and exit points. It also has very little impact on the overall time to travel on the bypass.

Council also considers that the cost to build the bypass as proposed is excessive and we understand from RMS that the budget estimate has already been exceeded. There appears to be little logic in the argument that building a bypass at the height proposed would cost the same or more than that built at the level of the 1 in 20 year flood contour. There are obvious examples such as Tamworth and Armidale where such configurations have been constructed. It also appears that the community’s interests and safety are being compromised as a result of RMS trying to deliver the project with a budget that was never enough.

3. Business and Tourism

Connectivity to towns along State Highways are critical for the vibrancy and livelihood of many towns and Scone is no different. Council’s vision of ‘A Quality Rural Lifestyle in a Vibrant, Caring and Sustainable Community’ can only be achieved through appropriate infrastructure, facilities and collaboration between State and Local Government and local stakeholders. This proposal does little help to achieve this vision.

RMS have stated: “It is anticipated that there would be a minor drop in passing trade for a small number of businesses along Kelly St in the short term, however this would not impact on the sustainability of any businesses. In the long term, it is anticipated that there would be no impacts of the proposal on local businesses”. The apparent lack of studies undertaken on the impact on our local businesses and the above assertion without evidence to back this up is appalling.

We understand that the Scone Chamber of Commerce are also providing a submission to the proposal on these matters, which Council supports.
4. **Environmental and Heritage**

There are a number of negative impacts from the proposed bypass and in particular with the raised roadway. These include:

- **Acoustic**: The new road will undoubtedly increase traffic noise through the proposed route and for properties neighbouring the bypass.
- **Visual**: RMS have clearly understated the visual impact on Scone and this is further evidenced by the lack of photomontages provided in the documentation.
- **Impact on property values**: Those properties neighbouring the bypass and that have views overlooking the bypass are likely to be adversely affected.
- **Privacy**: Individuals privacy is likely to be impacted during and after construction through the opening of sight lines and the elevated road.
- **Recreational facilities**: Council’s recreational facilities neighbouring the bypass will be adversely impacted during and after construction.
- **Light and glare**: There is a potential for headlight intrusion and glare into residential areas from traffic travelling along the bypass at night with their high-beam lights on.

Council also disagrees with the assertion that the environmental impacts of the proposal are not likely to be significant and therefore it was not necessary for an EIS to be prepared. On the contrary, it is clear from the review of environmental factors pursuant to Clause 228(2) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 that the proposal will have numerous short and long term negative impacts. We therefore contend that an EIS should be prepared for the project.

As an example, the batter slopes are very steep on some sections of the bypass. 1:2 batters are specified on the plans for large sections of the bypass. However, steep batters limit the landscape treatments and maintenance that can be provided. Steep batters also create safety concerns for traffic and it is therefore recommended that the batter slopes be flatter, say 1:4 to improve safety (in line with Ausroads Section 6) and landscape maintainability.

The proposed design, which is comparable to an inner city elevated expressway, is not in keeping with, nor sympathetic to, the semi-rural character of the area. The design has little regard for the local context and clearly places the needs of the highway above the interests of the local community.

In addition, Council’s Heritage Advisor has identified major deficiencies in the heritage impact assessment accompanying the REF. The Heritage Advisor’s comments are provided in Appendix C.

5. **Rail Overpass**

All of the proposed rail overpass options are unsatisfactory from Council’s point of view due to the significant negative impacts of each option. Further details on this are provided in Appendix A.

Council understands from recent conversations with RMS that they are happy to receive a formal submission on the rail overpass options by the end of March 2016. This is because the REF for the overpass options is yet to be developed. This indicates to Council that this project appears to be a low priority for RMS, where Council and the Emergency Services rate this project higher than the bypass.

Council has previously submitted a modified version of Option B and this continues to be Council’s preferred option. A copy of this proposal for clarification is provided in Appendix B, however Council may submit a further formal submission prior to the end of March 2016 if required.

6. **Compensation Package**

As yet there has been no discussions with RMS relating to what compensation Council may receive for the acquisition of Council owned and operated land. Further discussions need to take place immediately relating to this before Council would allow access to its property.

It is recommended that a detailed compensation package is developed including an upgrade plan for roads that are to be reclassified as local roads before they are handed over to Council.
Given the impact on the Scone CBD and local businesses and the apparent lack of any studies on the impact on local businesses, Council will also be seeking a contribution toward the redevelopment of the CBD to ensure that the township and businesses remain sustainable.

7. Other Plans and Omissions

Council is currently developing CBD Revitalisation Plans and any proposed bypass needs to be coordinated with these in mind.

Council has also put forward an additional option for a rail crossing further north near the saleyards/abattoir. While not an overpass option it may resolve a number of issues with the current proposals and Council believes this is an important consideration to ensure most of the heavy traffic remains out of the township.

RMS have informed Council that they need all submissions on the proposed bypass so they can meet a Commonwealth and State milestone of a completed REF by the end of April 2016. This signals to Council that the decision is already made, which was further evident by the most recent conversation where RMS has informed Council that there is scope for changes within the boundaries of the proposed bypass corridor but changes outside of this won't be considered.

There are potentially other options that may be worthwhile pursuing to reduce the costs of the overall project and achieve a better outcome. These have been raised with RMS but as noted above, because they are outside of the boundaries of the proposed bypass, RMS have effectively dismissed them without any further investigation.

Council is keen to see the project proceed, but not at the expense of the outcomes the community desires. For the reasons outlined above and those identified in this submission, Council rejects the proposed bypass and overpass as is currently outlined.

**Recommendations**

1. That RMS ensure the proposal meets all of the objectives of the project and those of Council and the community.
2. That roundabouts are installed at the northern and southern end of towns.
3. That a properly controlled intersection is installed where the bypass intersects with Liverpool Street.
4. That the speed limit on the bypass be reduced to 80kph.
5. That the design be modified to provide suitable access to all properties including provision for planned future growth, particularly at the northern end of Scone.
6. That an appropriate EIS be undertaken including revised environmental assessments.
8. That adequate land is made available for a pedestrian / cycleway.
9. That flora and fauna assessment is revised to include an assessment of the impacts of the proposal on the flying fox camp.
10. That the Heritage Impact Assessment be revised to address the deficiencies identified by Council’s Heritage Advisor.
11. That RMS provide a range of additional photomontages to better represent the visual impacts (viewpoints 1 – 10) of the proposal.
## Appendix A: Detailed Commentary

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| 1  | Bypass concept plan | Bypass north and south intersections | - The north and south intersections do not have full connectivity. Right turns are restricted at both intersections.  
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Both intersections be roundabouts.  
  Bypass speed limit | - The speed limit for the bypass is shown as 100kph. Previous versions (2013) had the speed as 80kph.  
- **RECOMMENDATION:** The speed limit on the bypass be reduced to 80kph.  
  Connectivity to current properties & future development | - The connection of the bypass with the northern end of Kelly Street is problematic as there has been inadequate provision made for access to existing residential land on the eastern side of Kelly Street. The bypass design does not provide suitable access for any proposed development and restricts the development potential of adjoining land.  
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Modify design to provide suitable access to all properties including provision for planned future urban growth. |
| 2  | In town rail bridge concept plan | Option A - St Aubins Street | - **REJECT:** This option is unacceptable due to the negative impacts on the residents and businesses (e.g. visual, acoustic, privacy, access, property values) on St Aubins Street. The Option also cuts Guernsey St. and adds little advantage for Emergency Services. |
| 3  | In town rail bridge concept plan | Option B - Kelly St (Elizabeth Park) | - **REJECT:** This option has a detrimental impact on Elizabeth Park, its functionality and amenity. There are also impacts on the bus/rail interchange, accessibility and local heritage. Council recommends a modified option as outlined in Appendix B. |
| 4  | In town rail bridge concept plan | Option C – Sherwood Street | - **REJECT:** This option addresses the emergency services access over the rail line but its location away from the CBD makes its usefulness problematic. This option is not considered good value for money and is rejected. |
| 5  | Review of environmental factors – Vol 1. | Executive summary Page i  
Need for the Proposal | - It is Council’s view that the proposal does not align with the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan objectives as the proposal does not improve travel and amenity within the Scone township. Given its close proximity to an urban area the proposal will have significant negative impacts on the town. For instance it does little to address the impacts on township (CBD) and infrastructure caused by cattle trucks accessing the Scone saleyard and abattoir via the Scone CBD. In relation to travel, the proposal will have little benefit for travel times experienced by local residents within the town. It is acknowledged that the proposal will improve travel times for highway traffic albeit minimal and it may increase safety within the CBD but there are significant safety issues with the design, particularly at the proposed intersection with St Aubins Street as identified in submissions from the emergency services. |
<p>| 6  | Review of environmental factors – Vol 1. | Proposal Objectives Page i and 11. | - Council supports the objectives of the project. The issue Council has is that we believe the proposal does not meet all the objectives, especially &quot;unimpeded access for emergency services&quot; and &quot;improve urban amenity in Scone&quot;. |</p>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Review of environmental factors – Vol 1.</td>
<td>Environmental Impacts Page ii</td>
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<td>• Impacts to properties adjacent to the bypass corridor will occur during both construction and operational phases of the project. Council believes that the operational impacts have been underestimated in the documentation and requires further consideration.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Review of environmental factors – Vol 1.</td>
<td>Justification and Conclusion Page iii and Appendix A.</td>
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<td>• Council disagrees with the assertion that the environmental impacts of the proposal are not likely to be significant and therefore it is not necessary for an EIS to be prepared. It is clear from the review of environmental factors pursuant to Clause 228(2) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 that the proposal will have numerous short and long term negative impacts. We therefore contend that an EIS should be prepared for the project.</td>
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<td>• RECOMMENDATION: That an appropriate EIS be undertaken.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Review of environmental factors – Vol 1.</td>
<td>3.2 Design Pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Page 26</td>
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<td>• The REF states that the proposal does not provide any new pedestrian or dedicated bicycle facilities. Council recognises that although outside the scope of work for construction, the bypass route and land acquisition should provide a future opportunity for a pedestrian/cycleway route parallel to the bypass.</td>
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<td>• RECOMMENDATION: That adequate land is made available for a pedestrian / cycleway.</td>
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<td>Review of environmental factors – Vol 1.</td>
<td>6.2.3 Potential Impacts Page 76 and Appendix E page 2 &amp;11.</td>
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<td>• Since the field surveys were undertaken for the flora and fauna assessment, a grey headed flying fox camp has established itself in trees within the project boundaries adjacent to the Scone Golf Club. The grey-headed flying fox is listed as vulnerable under the TSC Act and EPBC Act.</td>
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<td>• RECOMMENDATION: The flora and fauna assessment is revised to include an assessment of the impacts of the proposal on the flying fox camp.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Review of environmental factors – Vol 1.</td>
<td>6.5.5 Safeguards and Noise &amp; vibration Management Measures Page 130</td>
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<td>• The number of properties impacted by noise and qualifying for noise mitigation is substantial with many properties, particularly along Aberdeen and St Aubins Streets requiring at-property treatments (such as double-glazing windows). The extent of at-property treatments and the cost implications of these treatments is unclear. These impacts alone warrant a review of the design, particularly in relation to the elevation and design speed of the bypass and the suitability of the proposed intersection with St Aubins Street.</td>
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<td>• It is considered that the proposal will have significant adverse visual impacts and will detract from the existing character and visual amenity of the area especially given the prospect of significantly raised roadways. The proposal will be visually prominent from many viewpoints around Scone and it appears that RMS have provided only a few examples from different points demonstrating the impact. It is noted that there have been no photomontages provided for the sections of the bypass constructed on the earth embankments, nor any from the west looking back toward the township. It also appears that these have not been drawn to scale creating a false picture of what the visual impacts may actually be.</td>
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| 13  | Review of environmental factors – Vol 1. | Map of infrastructure Fig 3.1 sheet 3 | - RECOMMENDATION: That RMS provide a range of additional photomontages to better represent the visual impacts (viewpoints 1 – 10) of the proposal.  
- Does not identify the Old Court Theatre in the mapping nor any comment on impacts on this heritage item, which is very close to the proposed bypass.  
- There has been no adequate assessment of the heritage impacts on the Old Court Theatre |
| 14  | Review of environmental factors – Vol 1. | Property Impacts – sporting and recreational areas Scone Golf Course Page 205 | - The proposal suggests that there will be no connectivity between the golf course and club house during construction (up to 2 years). This will have significant impacts on the clubs operational activities. Also, suggests alternate access to the golf course will be via Kingdon St and Bill Rose complex. Consideration of golf club parking and ongoing operational activities needs further consideration in the proposal.  
- There has been no meaningful discussions with Council on the impacts of the Bill Rose Sports Complex or any of Council’s land or other facilities in particular the netball courts and the likelihood that temporary courts (P 205) may be required.  
- **Recommendation:** RMS engage with Council on development of Compensation Plans for Council land and facilities. |
- The proposal is expected to “result in reduced number of light and heavy vehicles passing through the town, however this is not expected to have adverse economic impacts on the local businesses”.  
- RMS state that this is based on stakeholder consultation, where it is noted that a survey of local businesses was not undertaken because local businesses were not large enough to keep records that would provide data on local vs through traffic spend. Therefore the proposal has relied on “anecdotal” evidence to come to the conclusion. “The businesses in Scone are only partially dependent on highway related trade”. “It is therefore anticipated that there would be a minor drop in passing trade for a small number of businesses along Kelly St in the short term, however this would not impact on the sustainability of any businesses. In the long term, it is anticipated that there would be no impacts of the proposal on local businesses”.  
- These statements are in Council’s view appalling and further evidence should be provided in order to make such remarks. |
| 16  | Review of environmental factors – Vol 1. | Community cohesion – barriers to movement and access | The documentation states that the proposal “Offers improved connectivity across both sides of the railway, removing the physical barrier that divides the community” what is this refereeing to? We do not have a crossing solution as yet and RMS have stated in recent meetings that the REF for the overpass is yet to be undertaken.  
- The proposal offers very little in the way of improved connectivity and according to emergency services travel times are not likely to improve.  
- Although the bypass is supposed to remove the rail line barrier, it in fact has created another visual barrier through the elevated option. |
### Review of environmental factors – Vol 1.

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<th>Agricultural impacts</th>
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<td>187</td>
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- The abattoir ownership has changed. The REF lists the owner as Primo Meats. JBS Australia Pty Ltd now own the abattoir and associated land.

### Landscaping – feature trees to provide entry marker to Scone.

| Northern and southern intersection of the bypass. Appendix H |

- The landscape plans in Appendix H shows 8 trees to provide an entry marker to Scone on the NEH. There are currently 73 plane trees on the southern entrance to Scone. Both entrances need to be of similar scale. The landscape design plans need to be coordinated with the existing plantings and provide similar scale of planting.

### Landscaping – Coordination with other plans.

| Appendix H. 4.0 Landscape concept |

- There are a number of plans under development in Scone including:
  - Scone CBD revitalisation plans
  - Scone golf course redesign
  - White Park masterplan
  - Bill Rose Sports Complex masterplan.
- The landscape plans need to be coordinated with these plans.

### Omissions from REF

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<td>20</td>
<td>Omission from REF</td>
<td>Kelly St concrete road pavement condition</td>
<td>Kelly Street is currently a state highway and therefore RMS’s responsibility for ongoing maintenance. Council understands that it is likely to become a regional road upon completion of the bypass and therefore Council’s responsibility. The plans and REF are silent on the condition and rehabilitation of the Kelly St concrete road pavement. The pavement was laid in the 1980s and is in poor condition. The pavement needs replacing and this should be undertaken before any handover occurs including any other associated roads or infrastructure. Other connections such as Aberdeen and St Aubins Street pavements should also be included in any upgrade.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Omission from REF</td>
<td>Dryland salinity</td>
<td>The REF is silent on dry land salinity. The bypass design needs to consider surface water and groundwater movement. The existing New England Highway earthworks are causing dry land salinity issues adjacent to the Scone Ausgrid substation. Local Land Services (LLS) can provide advice on local groundwater salinity in the Scone area.</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Omission from REF</td>
<td>Highway heavy vehicle passing opportunities</td>
<td>The New England Highway through Scone is used by heavy vehicles as a passing opportunity in Kelly St albeit dangerous in such a confined urban environment. The proposed bypass removes this passing opportunity and additional passing lanes are required north and south of Scone.</td>
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Appendix B – Council’s preferred option for the in-town overpass.
Appendix C – Heritage Advice

This advice is in response to the New England Highway Bypass of Scone REF, December 2015 and responds specifically to the Heritage Assessment: Historical Heritage Assessment, Virtus Heritage, November 2015.

Recommendations

1. The Heritage Assessment refers to the listed heritage items in the vicinity of the proposal. This needs to include all those heritage items in the vicinity and to give each of these items the correct level of significance. The Old Court Theatre is listed in the Upper Hunter LEP 2013. It also listed on the State Heritage Register.

Other items that have not been included in the Heritage Assessment are:

| Former Convent of Sisters of Mercy | 61 Kingdon Street | Lot 201, DP 883254 | Local | I12 |
| Scone | Scone Arts and Crafts (former Catholic church) | 63 Kingdon Street | Lot 33, DP 562934 | Local |

The vibration monitoring and dilapidations report will need to include all those listed heritage items in the vicinity including those items herein. The Impact Assessment contained in the Heritage Assessment, Historical Heritage Assessment, Virtus Heritage, November 2015, will need to include all those listed heritage items in the vicinity including those items herein. The Heritage Assessment, Heritage Impact Assessment, requires review after the preparation of construction design as recommended in the Heritage Assessment, p77.

In reference to the Heritage Item 9: West Scone Conservation Area p 79: The new work will be visible from listed heritage items on Kingdon Street and Liverpool Street. The Statement of Heritage Impact should assess the impact on views from the conservation area. A thorough visual assessment is required as a part of the statement of heritage impact.

The Heritage Items in the vicinity of the proposed new work will be impacted by the proposal. The new work will be visible from listed heritage items on Kingdon Street and Liverpool Street. The Statement of Heritage Impact should assess the impact on views from the conservation area. A thorough visual assessment is required as a part of the statement of heritage impact.

Conclusion

The Heritage Assessment, Historical Heritage Assessment, Virtus Heritage, November 2015, has not assessed the impacts of all those items in the vicinity of the proposal that are listed in the Upper Hunter LEP 2013. The Assessment and the consequent statement of heritage impact is therefore not a thorough assessment.

A major impact of the proposal will be the visual impacts. These impacts have not been assessed in the Heritage Assessment of the Statement of Heritage Impact. The statement of heritage impact therefore does not assess the major impact of this proposal on the heritage items in the vicinity or the conservation area.

Elizabeth Evans (B.Arch)  
Heritage Consultant - Heritage Advisor