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in Property Council of Australia

19 May 2025

Mr Iain Rush
Senior Infrastructure Contributions Planner
Cessnock City Council
PO Box 152
CESSNOCK NSW 2325

Via email: council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Rush,

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on Cessnock City Council's Draft Vineyards District Place Strategy (draft Strategy).

Our members include the nation's major investors, owners, managers, developers, designers, and builders of property of all asset classes. The property industry plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of our cities and regions and has a deep long-term interest in seeing them prosper as productive and sustainable places.

The Property Council commends Cessnock City Council's efforts in guiding the long-term planning and development of the Vineyards District. However, to achieve a practical and investment-attractive framework, the draft Strategy needs to be refined to better reflect contemporary market conditions, tourism dynamics, and housing policy priorities.

Our submission highlights key areas for consideration to ensure the Strategy can facilitate investment, support economic development, and accommodate housing and tourism growth in a sustainable and coordinated manner.

Strategic alignment and economic impacts

The draft Strategy references support for the wine and tourism sector to prosper in the Cessnock Vineyards District and a renewed focus on improving active and road transport infrastructure which is commended. There are several state and local government strategies referenced; however, there has been limited consideration of the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan (DMP). The tourism economy is an important contributor to employment across the Cessnock local government area (LGA). However, in its current form, the draft Strategy demonstrates a limited understanding of the challenges faced by the tourism industry in the Cessnock Vineyards District.

The Hunter Valley DMP is a key guiding document that contains several strategies that are directly relevant to the Place Strategy, including supporting eco-tourism, outdoor recreation, events, and artisan food/beverage industries—all currently constrained under the existing planning framework. We would welcome further consideration of the DMP in the final version of the Strategy.

The draft Strategy is supported by limited economic analysis, which would be beneficial in informing infrastructure and rezoning priorities. We recommend including a dedicated economic

profile section within the final strategy, as developing a detailed economic profile of the Cessnock Vineyards District will help inform and understand key challenges and opportunities driving land use change and investment activity.

Place Plan boundary

We appreciate the effort that has been made in defining the boundaries within the Place Plan. It is important to strike the right balance in protecting land with significant agricultural value, providing new opportunities for the future success of the Vineyard District, and supporting the logical expansion of existing areas. We request that in finalising the draft Strategy, Council reviews existing approvals and strategic plans and engages with landholders to identify any potential opportunities that could be included in the Place Plan.

Rural residential land uses

We acknowledge the housing targets set for the Cessnock LGA and commend Council's progress in facilitating much-needed approvals to deliver the homes needed in NSW under the National Housing Accord. However, one of the most significant threats facing the Cessnock Vineyards District is the progressive transition of land formerly used for viticulture to rural residential uses. This has resulted in a slow erosion of productive employment lands, affecting both the wine and tourism industries.

The final Strategy should identify viable viticultural land that could be rezoned to RU1 Primary Production in future to prevent fragmentation and encroachment of incompatible land uses. We also recommend that Council also considers changes to the planning framework and other transition measures to support productive and compatible land uses, such as:

- enabling dual occupancies or secondary dwellings for family succession,
- supporting long-term leasing to viticultural operators,
- offering voluntary agricultural easements, or
- facilitating low-impact tourism uses that generate income while preserving vineyard function.

Planning flexibility for tourism uses

We support the SP3 zone being used for tourist nodes; however, there needs to be more strategic differentiation between land that should be preserved for viticulture and land that is appropriate for integrated tourism development

Furthermore, we support regionally significant integrated tourism precincts that have been identified for potential expansion. These precincts provide tourism activation, outdoor recreation, events, and artisan food/beverage industries and deliver economic resilience, and align with State policy directions. Flexibility in planning will yield positive outcomes for planning and investment in the area, these precincts can also play a critical role in housing supply.

Finalisation and implementation

We acknowledge that the draft Strategy is a product of years of engagement with industry and the community. Timely finalisation of the draft Strategy will provide greater confidence and investment certainty in the area, subject to the abovementioned issues being addressed. This also needs to be supported by an implementation plan outlining short, medium, and long-term actions, responsibilities, and review mechanisms to ensure the Strategy is not only visionary but

deliverable. In preparing the implementation plan, we recommend that Council considers developing architectural and landscape design guidelines to ensure that development quality is maintained while allowing for innovation in project delivery.

Conclusion

We thank Cessnock City Council for the opportunity to provide a submission to the draft Strategy. If you have any questions about this submission, please contact me on 0431 662 652 or at nnelmes@propertycouncil.com.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nuatali Nelmes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nuatali" and the last name "Nelmes" clearly distinguishable.

Nuatali Nelmes

Hunter and Central Coast Regional Director
Property Council of Australia