

Planning minister advises 505 Minmi Road will go on public exhibition

By [Matthew Kelly](#), Newcastle Herald
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Planning Minister Paul Scully has given the strongest indication yet that he intends to approve a housing development at Fletcher that has been the subject of a two-decade long battle between conservationists and the land's owner.

In a letter to Wallsend MP Sonia Hornery, Mr Scully indicated that Kingston Property's proposal to build up to 170 homes at 505 Minmi Road would go on public exhibition in the near future.

City of Newcastle and Ms Hornery have supported a campaign by the Green Corridor Coalition to have the 26-hectare site incorporated into a continuous biodiversity corridor between the Watagans and Port Stephens.

Despite the push to conserve the land, [last year's Hunter Region Plan 2041, formally identified the site as "New Residential Land"](#).

It was followed by a Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP) determination in January that allowed the project to be assessed under the State Government's Gateway rezoning process.

"The approval is subject to conditions and the City of Newcastle is now working with the proponent to make these changes before the proposal is publicly exhibited," Mr Scully wrote in a recent letter to Ms Hornery.



Hunter Green Corridor Coalition spokesman Brian Purdue.

A City of Newcastle spokeswoman said the [outstanding matters related to ensuring an appropriate level of conservation](#) was achieved in accordance with the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.

"The elected council has strongly objected to the proposed 505 Minmi Road development and has reiterated this more than half a dozen times," she said.

"Much to council's disappointment, the former NSW government subsequently issued a Gateway Determination in January this year." The council also recently wrote to Ms Hornery calling for her to deliver upon the [State Government's election commitment to investigate the protection of 505 Minmi Road for conservation in the National Park Estate.](#)



The Hunter Green Corridor's map of the proposed biodiversity plan.

"We remain hopeful that the government will listen to the community and council and end this proposal once and for all so that the Green Corridor can be protected in perpetuity," the spokeswoman said.

Ms Hornery praised the Green Corridor's campaign to preserve the site. She said she would continue to raise her concerns relating to a lack of infrastructure with the minister.

"I'm deeply concerned about a lack of infrastructure in the area, City of Newcastle are yet to duplicate Minmi Road which adds to traffic gridlock, particularly in peak hour. Public transport improvements are sorely needed and I will continue working with the Transport Minister for these improvements.

"The current developments in the area are already raising the concerns of residents about noise complaints, dust and environmental issues as well as the inappropriateness of the developments in the area."



The area proposed to be developed.

Kingston Property owner Peter Durbin said his company was working to complete several detailed studies required to progress the project.

"We're working studiously to try and get everything done so we can meet the requirements of the council," he said.

The site was first identified in the 1990s as having potential for future urban development on the city's western fringe.

While 505 Minmi Road has remained undeveloped, surrounding urban development projects have proceeded.

"To the east you have got the Mirvac development Hidden Waters, there's another one to the west and also across the road," Mr Durbin said. "They have either been built or are in the process of being built.

"We are now an island in the middle of all that. To say we are part of a green corridor doesn't make sense."

Planning consultant Stephen Barr, who works for Kingston, said strategic land use studies had consistently shown the Lower Hunter Green Corridor was located to the west of 505 Minmi Road.



Stephen Barr

"The place to get the balance (between conservation and development) right is at the high strategic level. You really need to be looking at that level to understand where the housing goes and where the green corridors go," he said.

"The Hunter green corridor, for almost 20 years, has not run through 505 Minmi Road. That land has been identified for investigation for housing in multiple studies.

"That's not to say we shouldn't be investigating on a site-by-site basis where development should go and where conservation should go, but the big picture of what they (Green Corridor Coalition) are talking about should be done as part of those strategic studies."

Hunter Green Corridor Coalition spokesman Brian Purdue said Mr Scully had not responded to a letter that outlined the group's "justifiable concerns" about the project.

"Would the minister now explain why, after 20 years of trying, this environmentally zoned site was last year placed in a legally binding state plan that allows urban development," he said.

"Also, after 12 years of refusing this development, Newcastle council's rights to make the decision on this site were suddenly revoked at the same time."