

McCloy hits out over council inaction

IAN KIRKWOOD
8/11/2008 4:00:00 AM

OUTSPOKEN developer Jeff McCloy used a business lunch yesterday to deliver a long critique of Newcastle City Council, where he said even the simplest issue went "round and round in circles".

Mr McCloy, whose tangles with various local government authorities have been well documented over the years, was addressing a lunch audience before the Hunter Business Chamber's annual general meeting at Newcastle City Hall.

Mr McCloy was recently named as the chamber's businessman of the year.

Many in the audience expected him to unload on Newcastle council and he did not disappoint.

"We have projects in Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, Maitland, New Zealand and Cairns, and all of them have some issues with them but they are nothing on the issues we have here with Newcastle council," Mr McCloy said.

He said he was so embarrassed about the run-down nature of Hunter Street and surrounds that he tried to avoid it whenever he was hosting visitors from outside the region.

He said Brisbane and Newcastle were similar-looking cities in the 1950s but by 1990 Brisbane had pulled well ahead and the differences were even more dramatic today.

He said Newcastle council was unable to look after its own properties yet its planners insisted on "putting barriers in the way" of everything that he and other developers tried to do.

"Look at the Frederick Ash building, 30 years it hasn't had a lick of paint on it," Mr McCloy said.

"This council must set an example. How can it be critical of others when it can't set a standard itself.

"Yes, I am critical of the council and some of its senior staff. Not to embarrass them, but to point out that you've got to have cultural change."

Mr McCloy said that after meeting council general manager Lindy Hyam he was hopeful "we may be in for a new era".

"What I want is for every business person in the community to give her your support because she is going to need it."

He said he "did have some hope" for the new council but it was evaporating rapidly in light of the way that most of the councillors voted against Lord Mayor John Tate's latest plan to counter graffiti.

Chamber spokeswoman Jill Wyborn said she had expected Cr Tate to attend but he had not, and no other councillor or senior staff member appeared to be in the audience.