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# Plans for high towers dwarfing Sydney's Central station spark concerns

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Plans to allow for buildings up to 206 metres high at the southern end of Sydney's CBD, including a 39-storey tower planned for tech giant Atlassian, have stoked fears that they will dwarf the landmark Central railway station and lead to "adverse visual impacts".

An area named the western gateway is the first stage of a massive redevelopment of the 24-hectare Central precinct, which extends from the railway station to Cleveland Street.

[An artist's impression of the towers on the western edge of Sydney's Central station.]

The area to the western edge of the railway needs to be rezoned to allow for the redevelopment targeting tech firms and start ups. Atlassian plans a tower up to 180 metres for its headquarters, which will comprise 39 levels, five of which will be occupied by a YHA hostel of 500 beds.

While the redevelopment of the precinct has received substantial support, the proposal to permit towers up to 206 metres high has raised concerns that the sandstone train station will be "overwhelmed" by the new high rises nearby. The National Trust said the increase in the allowable building heights was "totally out of context with the surrounding area", pointing out that Central Station's clock tower is 75 metres tall and "even the nearby UTS tower is only 120 metres".

"No amount of design guidelines, setbacks or urban design provisions can negate such height," it said in a submission to the Department of Planning. "There are only nine towers over 200 metres in height in Sydney, and certainly none of these are located in this area."

At present, the 35-metre high Henry Deane office block is the tallest of the buildings occupying the government-owned land earmarked for the western gateway.

[The 24-hectare Central Precinct will be the state's largest urban renewal project, surpassing Barangaroo. *CREDIT: TRANSPORT FOR NSW*]

The Trust said the western gateway would kick start the broader renewal of the Central precinct, and "setting the correct tone in this space is thus very important". "Pressure will exist to maximise development potential on this site," it said. "Sydney does not need another Barangaroo ... which has come to be dominated by private interests with an increasingly small area of public space."

The rezoning at Central is part of the biggest shake-up of planning controls in the core of the CBD in more than four decades. It will also allow for towers higher than 300 metres near Circular Quay, Town Hall and Barangaroo, which is significantly above the cap of 235 metres at present.

The Heritage Council argues that the significant increase in the maximum building heights at the western gateway is not in keeping with the character of the area, and will result in "adverse visual impacts" on Central station. It wants the planned building heights to be reduced.

But YHA Australia, which supports the plans for the western gateway, argues it will attract young people and "activate" the Central precinct at night and on weekends.

The University of Technology is also supportive of the precinct renewal, but warned that a major pedestrian tunnel near Central station risks becoming a bottleneck due to a large increase in the number of people in the area once it is developed.

The university is pushing for an expansion of the Lee Street tunnel, which connects Henry Deane Plaza to Railway Square and the northern side of George Street.