

03 February 2021

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Submitted online

Atlassian - Office and Hotel Development (Office and Hotel Tower and Adaptive Reuse of the Former Inwards Parcel Sheds)



Figure 1: The proposed Atlassian Building, overshadowing Henry Deane Plaza to the left, and illustrating the massive change in scale when compared to the landmark Central Station Clocktower and all other surrounding development. (Source: Design Report)

The National Trust makes the following submission on the proposal relating to the “Adaptive Reuse” of the Former Inwards Parcels Shed (8-10 Lee Street, Haymarket NSW 2000), referred to as “Atlassian Central.”

The redevelopment of Sydney’s Central Station is a true city-shaping project, with the potential to build upon the legacy of the existing historic buildings that comprise this place, and which can and must be the starting point for any successful placemaking.

Central Station is a building of the highest architectural importance to Sydney, and its construction was directly responsible for the surrounding environment. When the National Trust listed the *Central Station / Haymarket Urban Conservation Area* in June 1981, it noted that:

“(when) the railway terminus shifted from Redfern to Central, and Railway Gates (Railway Square) became a major station for trams and cabs as well. Banks,

department stores, theatres, office buildings, public and institutional buildings, and the vast railway structures themselves, imposed on the district the character it largely retains today. This is in great measure also due to the impact of the railways: the area declined with the building of the city circle and harbour crossing, 1926 to the mid-1930s, which encouraged a shift in business activity northwards.”

The National Trust raise the following major concerns with this proposal:

1. It is clearly inconsistent with the State Heritage Register Listing for Central Station

The Central Station precinct, a parcel of land and collection of buildings in Government ownership and care, was listed on the NSW State Heritage Register under the NSW Heritage Act as *Sydney Terminal and Central Railway Stations Group* in April 1999. This listing, designed to protect this important piece of the heritage of NSW, gave extensive details as to why the place was of significance. It is important to note that this listing was **for an entire historic precinct**, and included not only the Sydney Terminal and Yards, but also the Western Yard, Darling Harbour Branch Line, Mortuary Station, West Carriage Sheds, Prince Alfred Sidings, the Railway Institute, and Parcel Post Office.

The Statement of Significance for the listing notes that the Sydney Terminal and Yards is significant:

- *As a **major terminal by world standards**, comparable with late Victorian and Edwardian metropolitan stations in Europe, Great Britain and North America;*
- *As a unique terminal, in NSW, not only in extent but also for the high standard of design of the associated buildings in particular the Mortuary Station, Railway Institute and the Parcels Post Office;*
- *As one of the two longest continuously operating yard/workshop complexes in Australia, dating from the 1850s. Although many of the original functions have been superseded, or operations transferred to other sites, evidence of the working 19th century yard remains extant;*
- *As a major multi-level transport interchange between pedestrians, vehicular traffic and trains and later trams and subsequently buses. Since its establishment in 1855 it has been one of the busiest transport interchanges in Australia;*
- ***As the largest formally planned addition to the urban fabric of Sydney prior to World War 1, intended to form a gateway to the city;***
- *The railway yards, the Mortuary Station, Railway Institute Building, terminus and clock tower are **familiar Sydney landmarks**, particularly to rail travellers.*

The listing notes that Railway Square has long been an important **gateway to the city**, and that:

*“During Governor Macquarie's term, the future site of the Sydney Terminal was beyond the limits of settlement, which were marked by the tollhouse located at the end of George Street and at the entrance to Railway Square.... Although Railway Square no longer signifies the entrance to the interior of the colony, at the junction of George and Pitt Streets, it has always channelled traffic from the southern parts of the city and out west to Parramatta. **From the building of the first railway terminus at Devonshire Street in 1855, it was an important focus for the arrival of country persons to the city and later commuters into the city.***

2. It is not a scheme which engages with the historic fabric in a suitable way

Recent, award-winning, upgrades to major international railway terminals in London, Tokyo, New York, and Barcelona (among others) have all been successfully achieved whilst retaining the architectural integrity and urban character and amenity of these historic places. There is no high-rise component in any of these places, let alone any built directly on top of a relatively modest railway shed.

There are endless possibilities for Sydney's Central Station that can celebrate and engage with its historic buildings and urban presence. Heatherwick Studio's reinvention of the Coal Drops Yard at London's Kings Cross Station is an example of conservation-led adaptive re-use that has been widely applauded. This project, unlike the current proposal for Central Station, takes the heritage buildings, their significance, form and materiality as a starting point to bring life to a historic industrial centre in London.



Figure 3: The Coal Drops Yard in London is an example of the heritage interventions that are possible, but sadly lacking, in the redevelopment of Sydney's Central Station. Winner of the 2019 Institution of Civil Engineers award, the RIBA London Award, RIBA National Award, and the 2019 A+ Awards Project of the Year, this project combines the best of modern design by a world-class architectural practice and sound conservation work. (Source: www.visitlondon.com)

3. It will have an impact on Railway Square and surrounds

The impact of this proposal is of course not limited to its immediate context, but to its wider place within this unique area of the City of Sydney with its own special identity. Railway Square is listed as a heritage item under the City of Sydney LEP, with "the views and vistas of various landmark Federation era buildings" noted as being of High Significance. The Statement of Significance records that:

*"Railway Square combines monumental heritage buildings and streetscapes with a **sequence of varied open spaces**. It is the **major visual and functional gateway** to the city centre from the west for both public transport and road traffic."*

This key transportation node defines where the city centre and the Ultimo/Pymont street grids converge. The listing describes the nature of this public space:

“Key transportation node physically defined by several significant landmark Federation era buildings, associated with commerce and the development of the Central Railway and Station. Fine examples of brick and sandstone eight to ten storey buildings. Expansive views to Central Station, contained views in other directions...”

In the mid 1980's the Department of planning produced urban design guidelines from Broadway which identified the role of Railway Square as a gateway. The gateway theme was taken up in an ideas competition conducted by the Institute of Architects which produced a wide range of proposals for Railway Square, Central Station and the locality.”

The proposal will interrupt important views from various locations of the Central Station Clocktower, Parcels Post Building, Marcus Clarke Building. The height and location of the proposed building will see it directly overshadow these buildings, Henry Deane Plaza, and Railway Square. This open, sun-filled gateway to the City of Sydney will be overshadowed, the prominence of the clocktower forever diminished, and the nature of this historic precinct detrimentally changed.



FIGURE 46 EXISTING CONDITIONS

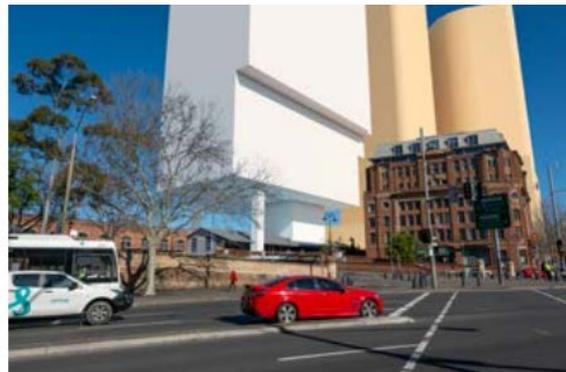


FIGURE 47 EXISTING VIEW WITH ATLISSIAN APPROVED ENVELOPE AND THE DEXUS-FRASERS APPROVED ENVELOPE



FIGURE 14 EXISTING CONDITIONS



FIGURE 15 EXISTING VIEW WITH ATLISSIAN APPROVED ENVELOPE AND THE DEXUS-FRASERS APPROVED ENVELOPE

Figure 4: The views analysis for the development shows the extremely detrimental impact of the development on key views towards the precinct. More appropriate placement of a building of a similar scale could markedly improve the visual impact of this new redevelopment of Central Station. City streets which terminate in open sky (in particular the view from Quay Street at bottom) are far preferable to those dominated by a tall, wide building. The perceived “elegance” of the comparatively slender northern elevation of the proposed building is outweighed in these views by the long E-W elevation. The much-criticised International Towers at Barrangaroo have had the same detrimental impact on that precinct. (Source: Visual Assessment Report)

4. The views analysis is deliberately misleading

The key view of the development's impact on its main urban context – the entry point to the city from Broadway at Railway Square – is supposed to be analysed by View 12 in the Visual Impact Report. This view, as selected, deliberately obscures the impact of this major development by obscuring it using the Medina Hotel and even shop awnings. Urbis contend that the overall impact of this view is "low" and that:

*"The upper parts of the proposed tower will be visible in upward, oblique views above foreground built form. **In this regard the proposed development does not create any significant visual effects in the composition of this view.** The construction of the built form proposed will not block views to or between heritage items, access to scenic features and will block only areas of open sky."*

The National Trust do not consider that this very important view has been appropriately assessed, and do not agree that the development will **not create any significant visual effects** to this gateway view to the city. It is very clear that this development will have a major visual effect on Railway Square, and the National trust believe that areas of open sky need to be considered as important features of our cities generally, and of their open squares in particular.



FIGURE 50 EXISTING CONDITIONS



FIGURE 51 EXISTING VIEW WITH ATLISSIAN APPROVED ENVELOPE AND THE DEXUS-FRASERS APPROVED ENVELOPE



Figure 4: The comparison between View 12 as presented in the Visual Analysis Report (above) and as approximated by the National Trust (below) shows the difference in this key "gateway" view to Sydney. When combined with the impact of the proposed development of the Adina Hotel (indicated in orange) show that the open sky nature of Railway Square (an important element of any square) will be greatly compromised. (Source: Visual Assessment Report, and Google Maps with National Trust overlay)

5. “Relocation” and “dismantling” are not good conservation outcomes.

The Heritage Impact Statement (p.122) claims that:

“the proposal provides for extensive intervention into the fabric of the Former Inwards Parcels Shed through demolition, dismantling, reconstruction and modification. The impacts of these major changes will be mitigated through the adoption of a complex methodology including detailed recording of the place, careful dismantling and salvage of fabric for reconstruction or donation through a salvage centre, and careful reconstruction for adaptive reuse... While the adverse heritage impact on the existing shed is acknowledged, this is not wholesale demolition, and every attempt to retain, restore and reconstruct significant fabric has been made in order to minimise or mitigate the potential heritage impacts.”

The National Trust would argue, using the philosophy of the Burra Charter which recommends a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible, that the proposed impact on heritage fabric is not a good heritage outcome. While the placement of the proposed tower directly on top of the Inwards Parcels Shed was always going to have a major impact upon this building, the demolition of the entire northern wall and ramp to facilitate its construction is another very significant heritage impact. The consultant has noted that the wall will be “dismantled and rebuilt” yet notes that there will be a “*intended salvage rate of 5% - 10% of bricks where feasible given existing the cementitious mortar.*” Make no mistake – this will be a new wall, not the old wall “sensitively reinstated.”

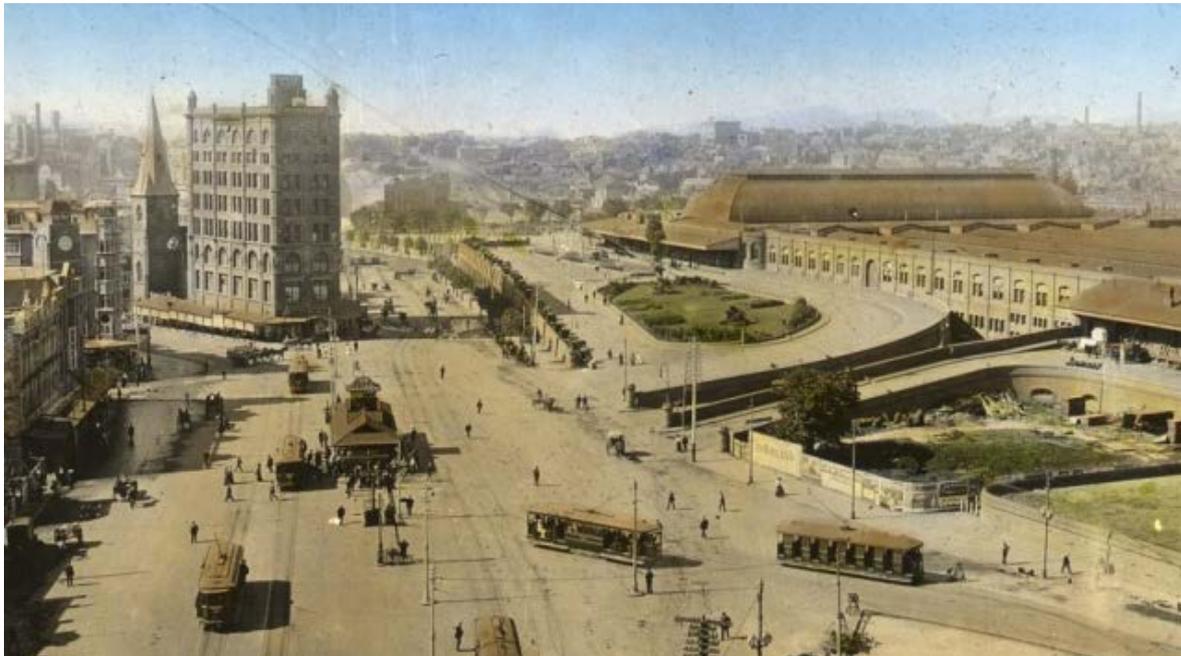


Figure 5: A 1910 image of Railway Square, prior to the construction of the Parcels Post building. The importance and scale of the ramp in servicing the station and the Inwards Parcels Shed in particular is clear to see. (Source: Wikipedia. Image copied from a hand coloured glass lantern slide found in the Oregon State University Archives in the USA)

The Trust acknowledge that modification of this wall in order to facilitate broader improved pedestrian networks at Central Station is possible and that such works can be sensitively carried out. The **demolition** (not “dismantling”) of this entire wall simply in order to facilitate the building of a new building (with its own severe negative heritage impacts) is not an acceptable conservation

outcome. Arguments that the wall will be “reconstructed” yet using up to 95% brand new material make the exercise pointless. The National Trust do not agree with the Urbis report which states that it will “retain, salvage, conserve and reinstate as much original fabric as possible, while allowing for a sympathetic reconstruction of the lower brick wall with new bricks to address aesthetic, structural and heritage concerns.” The only way to address heritage concerns is to leave the wall intact.

The ramp and wall are very important original components of the Central Precinct generally, and of the Parcels Post Office in particular. All efforts should be made to retain this significant original fabric. Other than convenience, there is very little evidence to support its demolition and then “fake” reconstruction.

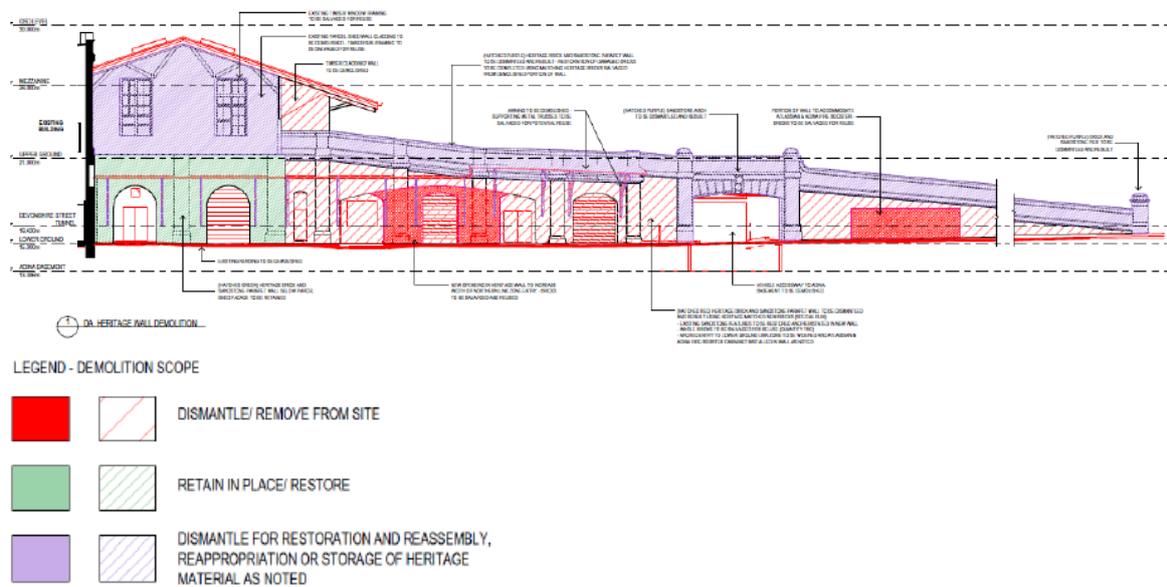


Figure 6: The extent of demolition of original fabric is clear to see in this image. This is an unacceptable heritage impact on this very important, major early wall that forms a core part of the historic Central Precinct at Railway Square. (Source: Heritage Impact Statement)

6. The proposal does not build upon the local character of the place.

The NSW Government has recently invited comment on its “Local Character and Place Guidelines”. The Planning Department website states that:

*“The NSW Government has heard that communities would like local character consideration to be elevated in NSW planning decision making. **The NSW Government is actively seeking to encourage neighbourhoods’ people are proud to live in, where the community collaborates with local and state governments to share what they value about their area...***

*The Local Character and Place Guideline aims to support councils and communities to **consider and nurture the unique identity of a place**, while at the same time meeting the needs of a changing NSW. This guideline provides tools to help define existing character and set a desired future character that aligns with the strategic direction for an area.”*

The Local Character and Place Guidelines (p.15) note that heritage is an important part of local character and identity, and that it should help shape modern communities and planning outcomes. The guideline notes that:

*“Managing heritage is not just about managing the material culture of the past, it is also about understanding how heritage influences and shapes communities today. For example, **in conservation areas or places of heritage significance, local character and place identity is often shaped by its built or natural heritage items. This relationship and influence should be considered when defining local character.**”*

There is very little in the current proposal to indicate that the heritage items in this place have been able to shape or influence the future local character of the place. Ironically, the same guideline advises that where areas are not heritage listed, but where the community wish to see those heritage characteristics maintained “as the area changes and grows”, they should investigate formal heritage conservation listing “**as part of broader strategic planning so that regional and district strategic plans align with new conservation areas.**” The numerous heritage listings, both formal and informal, of the Central Station precinct seem to have had little to no effect upon the protection of this vital precinct of historical, social, aesthetic, and technical significance. This proposal makes a mockery of the notion of State Heritage Register listing protecting a listed item – surely the basis of any community perception and expectation of such a listing under NSW legislation.

The proposal would also seem to ignore the plea in the NSW Government Architect “Design Guide for Heritage” which maintains that it is not just those grand structures that are of importance going forward. Even modest buildings, such as the parcels shed, need to be part of the framework upon which we build our future. *“We have understood that an approach to heritage which keeps only the grandest of structures does not accurately represent our whole story, and that **we need to acknowledge and celebrate places for what occurred there rather than just architectural form.** Many places are a reminder of the resourcefulness of our ancestors and yet other places represent and keep what was once commonplace but now is lost.”*

The National Trust would argue that the proposal does not meet many of the heritage objectives of the Design Guide for heritage, including “better fit” (contextual, local and responds sympathetically to the character of a place) and “better for community”(local character and identity, thoughtful interpretation).

6. The proposal does not maintain the significance of the heritage item

As is clear from the documentation, the proposal has a very severe negative heritage impact upon the former Inwards Parcels Shed.

The National Trust do not support the amount of demolition, proposed “reconstruction”, and in many cases inappropriate adaptation of this original structure. Although imaginative, there is little in the treatment of the original building to suggest its original function or use. Not surprisingly, the removal of its floors, walls and roofs leaves little to work with. The Trust note that the Heritage Impact Statement argues that *“In lieu of the original opaque corrugated iron cladding of the existing building, a combination of clear and reeded glass cladding has been designed to recollect the original metal cladding whilst responding to contemporary requirements of a building lobby. The arrangement of these reeded glazing panels adjacent the timber portals along the western elevation of the shed reinforces the vertical rhythm of the former cladding.”* The proposed design with its sleek

lines and expansive spaces would appear to have more in common with the contemporary Nezu Museum in Tokyo by Kenjo Kuma than it would with the original function, layout and operation of the Parcels Shed.



Figure 7: The extent of demolition and alteration of original fabric to the Parcels Shed in order to replace it with materials “more suitable to a contemporary office foyer” is not a good heritage outcome. The new “reeded glass” walls of the building and its two-stage overhanging roof are clear references to modern design, rather than historically based. (Source: Heritage Impact Statement. Images of Nezu Museum from Architectural Record and author’s own image)

The Trust agree with the NSW Heritage Council assessment outlined in the Design Statement that *“the ‘green’ roof proposed for the former Inwards Parcel Shed... whilst understanding that part of the concept was partly around pre-contact Aboriginal landscape recognition, the Council recommends that this element of the design be removed to better reflect the original, unadorned industrial character of the shed.”*

7. Conclusion

Central Precinct Renewal Program’s Draft Strategic Vision for the Central State Significant Precinct and Western Gateway Rezoning Proposal. It is noted that the stated aim of the program is to “create a precinct with a real sense of place, which connects into surrounding neighbourhoods, and draws on the character and heritage of this landmark location.”¹ This is an admirable aim, and it is hoped that measures are put in place to ensure that this is indeed the outcome of this massive project.

There is little doubt that the areas surrounding Central Station can benefit from some renewal projects, and the National Trust supports aims to revitalise this important area of the city. The Trust are however concerned with the way this is done, and encourage that the important and historic existing components of the place are seen as enablers of, rather than barriers to, a place with a unique urban identity.

The proposal which is currently being put forward would have a severe negative heritage impact on the Parcels Post and Inwards Parcels Shed buildings and their wider setting. This fine example of past urban design is set to be replaced with an excellent example of the worst in current planning practices – where a new tower will literally overhang a unique historic building and overshadow a public area.

At the time of its construction, Sydney’s Central Station was, in the words of the Draft Strategic Vision, “inspired by the grand classical stations of Europe.”² The redevelopment of the site should also be influenced by the best of modern planning strategies and station redevelopments. The Trust

¹ <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/current-projects/central-precinct-renewal-program>

² Central Precinct Draft Strategic Vision (October 2019), p.15

supports the Preliminary Precinct Plan aims regarding Built Form and Heritage that the precinct should:

- “Establish a context-responsive built form approach that achieves a balanced distribution of height, density and scale”
- “Reinforce the iconic architecture of the Sydney Terminal building, former Parcels Post Office and Mortuary Station as important and defining character elements in the streetscape”
- “Establish a sensitive built form response to heritage interfaces, including retaining a sufficient heritage curtilage and separation to potential future development and visual connections to key heritage items.”
- “Ensure that any proposed built form does not reduce the amenity of existing public open space, particularly Prince Alfred Park”³

The proposal is at odds with most of the expressed visions for the Central Precinct, in particular the aims to “establish a context-responsive built form approach that achieves a balanced distribution of height, density and scale” and “reinforce the iconic architecture of the Sydney Terminal building, former Parcels Post Office and Mortuary Station as important and defining character elements in the streetscape.”

The Trust notes section 3.2.1 Heritage of the Draft Design Guide has the following objective:

“Development should appropriately respond to items of heritage significance within the sub-precinct and ensure items of heritage significance are maintained and celebrated wherever possible.”⁴

The Trust does not believe this proposal is a suitable heritage outcome for this most important heritage precinct.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Burdon', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

David Burdon
Director, Conservation

³ Central Precinct Draft Strategic Vision (October 2019), p.28

⁴ Draft Design Guide Version 1 | Western Gateway Sub-precinct, p.17