

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

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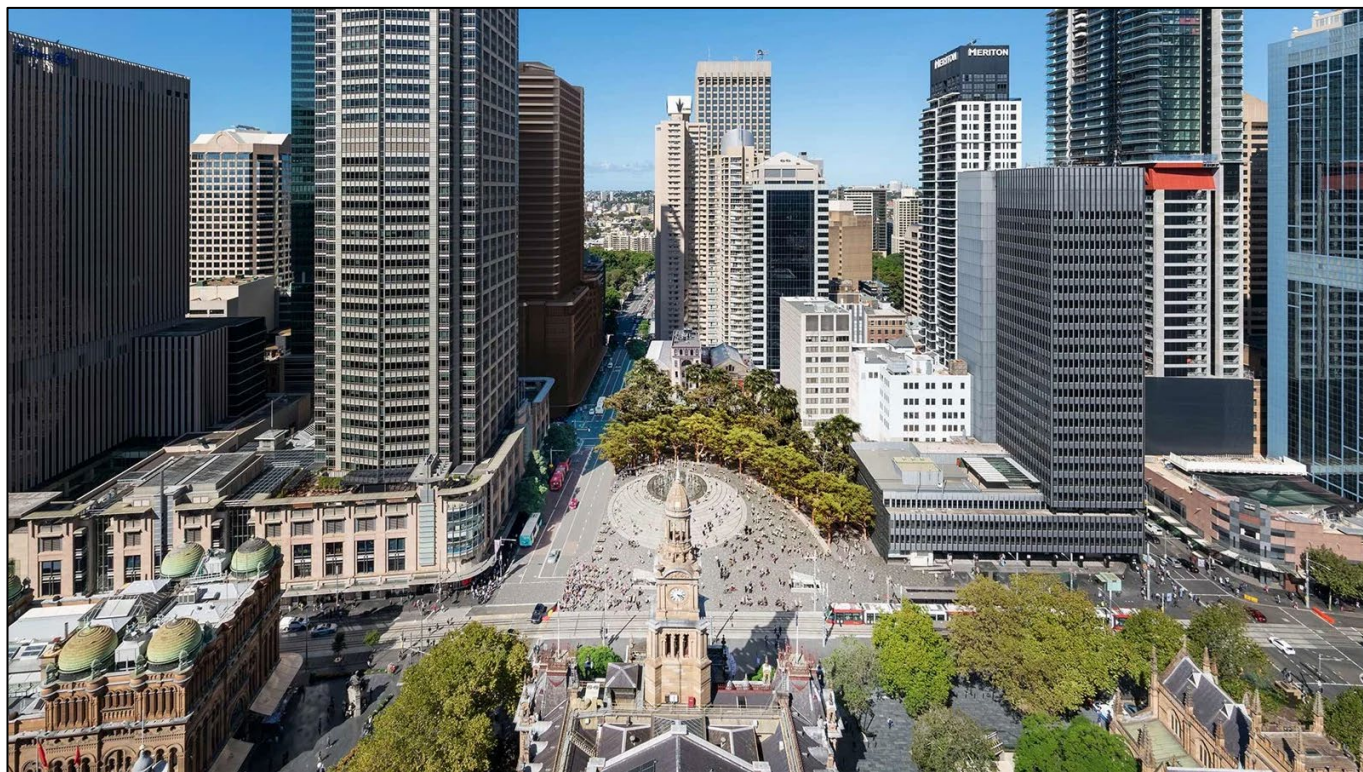


Ministerial Call-in

Town Hall Square Proposal

Report to the Independent Planning Commission

September 2026





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Ministerial Call-in

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (the Department) seeks the Independent Planning Commission's (the Commission) advice on the proposed call-in of the Town Hall Square proposal under Section 4.36(3) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).

The Department is proposing to request that the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces (Minister) declare the Town Hall Square proposal located at 532-540 George Street, 542-544 George Street, 546-552 George Street, 5-7 Park Street, 295-301 Pitt Street, 303-305 Pitt Street and 307 Pitt Street, Sydney as State Significant Development (SSD). The Applicant would likely be the City of Sydney Council (CoS).

Typically, an Applicant requests the Minister call-in a proposal, however, in this case, the Department is requesting the Minister call-in the proposal as SSD given the impacts on a culturally and commercially significant part of the Sydney CBD, on surrounding State infrastructure as well as the cost of the development and the significant level of community interest.

This report presents the Department's consideration of the call-in consistent with the Department's *Guideline on 'call-in' of State significant development under the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979* (the Guideline).

1.2 Project location

The subject site is located opposite Sydney Town Hall and is bounded by George Street to the west, Park Street to the north and Pitt Street to the east in the Sydney Local Government Area (LGA) (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**).

CoS owns six of the seven buildings. CoS recently compulsorily acquired the remaining building (542-544 George Street).

Further details of the site and the surrounding area are described in **Table 1**.



Figure 1 | Site context map (Base source: Nearmap)



Figure 2 | Site boundary (Base source: Nearmap)

Table 1 | Key aspects of the development site

Aspect	Description
Address	532-540 George Street, 542-544 George Street, 546-552 George Street, 5-7 Park Street, 295-301 Pitt Street, 303-305 Pitt Street and 307 Pitt Street, Sydney
Legal description	Lot 1 DP79775, Lot 13 DP80276, Lot 2 DP231095, Lot 1 DP440232, Lot 1 DP180188, Lot B DP179745, Lot 1 DP66011 and Lot 6 DP69955
Site area	4,645sqm
LGA	Sydney
Existing development	Seven mixed use buildings varying between three and 16 storeys, with ground floor retail and retail, hotel, education and commercial uses above.
Surrounding development/roads	North: Park Street and ‘the Galleries’ (retail and commercial) on the opposite side of Park Street. East: Pitt Street and a pub, church and commercial building on the opposite side of Pitt Street. South: mixed use retail and commercial buildings. West: George Street and the light rail, and Sydney Town Hall on the opposite side of George Street.
Heritage	The site is not listed as a heritage item but adjoins a locally listed item and is located in the vicinity of State listed items.

1.3 Project history

In 1982, CoS supported a proposal to buy properties to create a new square opposite Sydney Town Hall. The first property on the site was purchased in 1985.

CoS undertook extensive community consultation in 2007 and engagement as part of Sustainable Sydney 2030 and Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision plans/policies and with key stakeholders on the preparation of the Town Hall Precinct Public Domain Plan.

The Town Hall Square development is identified in the Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 (SLEP) and City Plan 2036 as a key public space.

On 23 February 2026, CoS resolved to endorse the scope of works for the Town Hall Square proposal.

In August 2026, designs for the Town Hall Square were publicly released.

2 Project

The Town Hall Square proposal comprises demolition of existing buildings, interface works, establishment of new public square and city greening. Key aspects of the proposal are identified in the project scope at **Appendix A**.

The new square would be designed for everyday use as well as for civic events and community gatherings. The project includes a generous public open space, approximately 4,200sqm (**Figure 3** and **Figure 4**), with indicatively:

- a minimum of 30 new native trees that would provide 50 per cent canopy cover.
- an interactive water element.
- integrated seating and movable chairs and tables.
- new lighting.
- infrastructure to support events and public activities.
- improved walking connections to transport hubs.

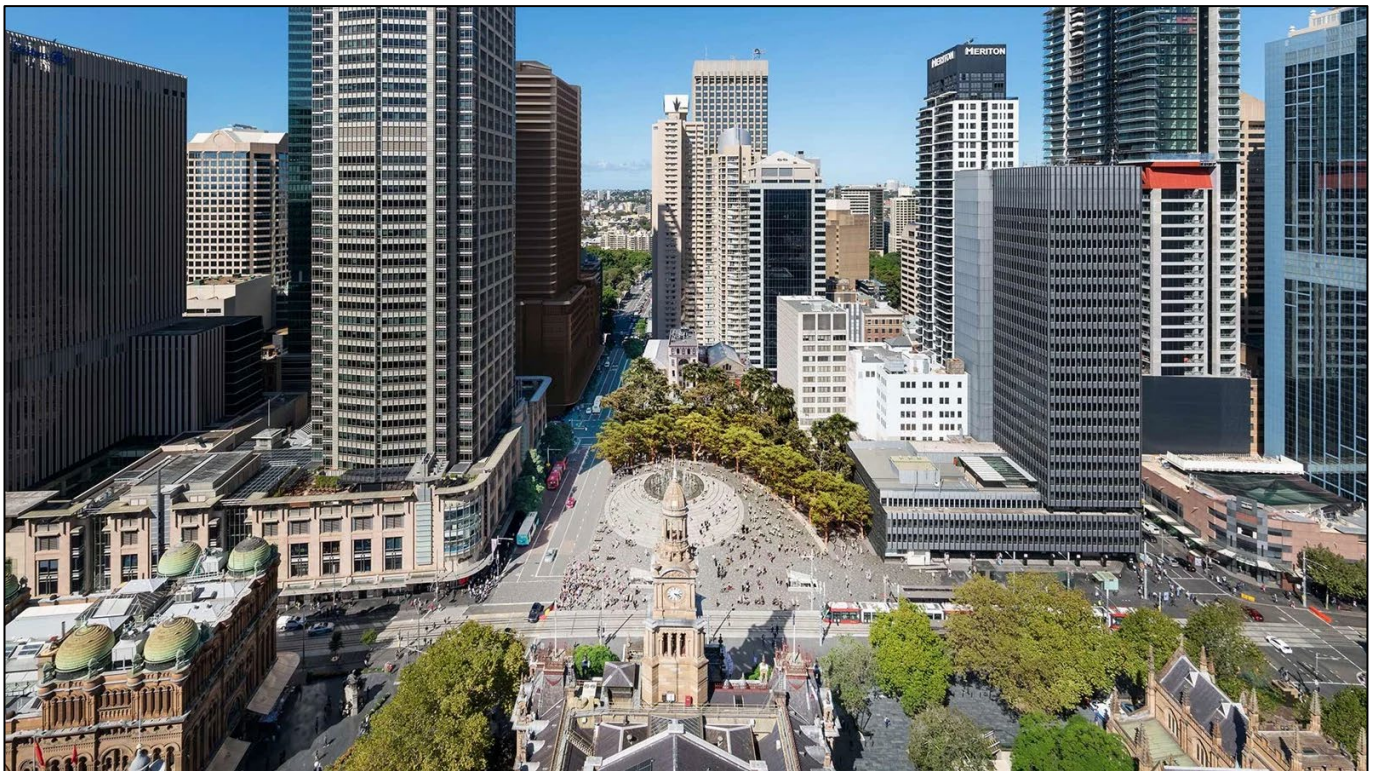


Figure 3 | Artist impression of an aerial view of the Town Hall Square proposal (Source: CoS website)

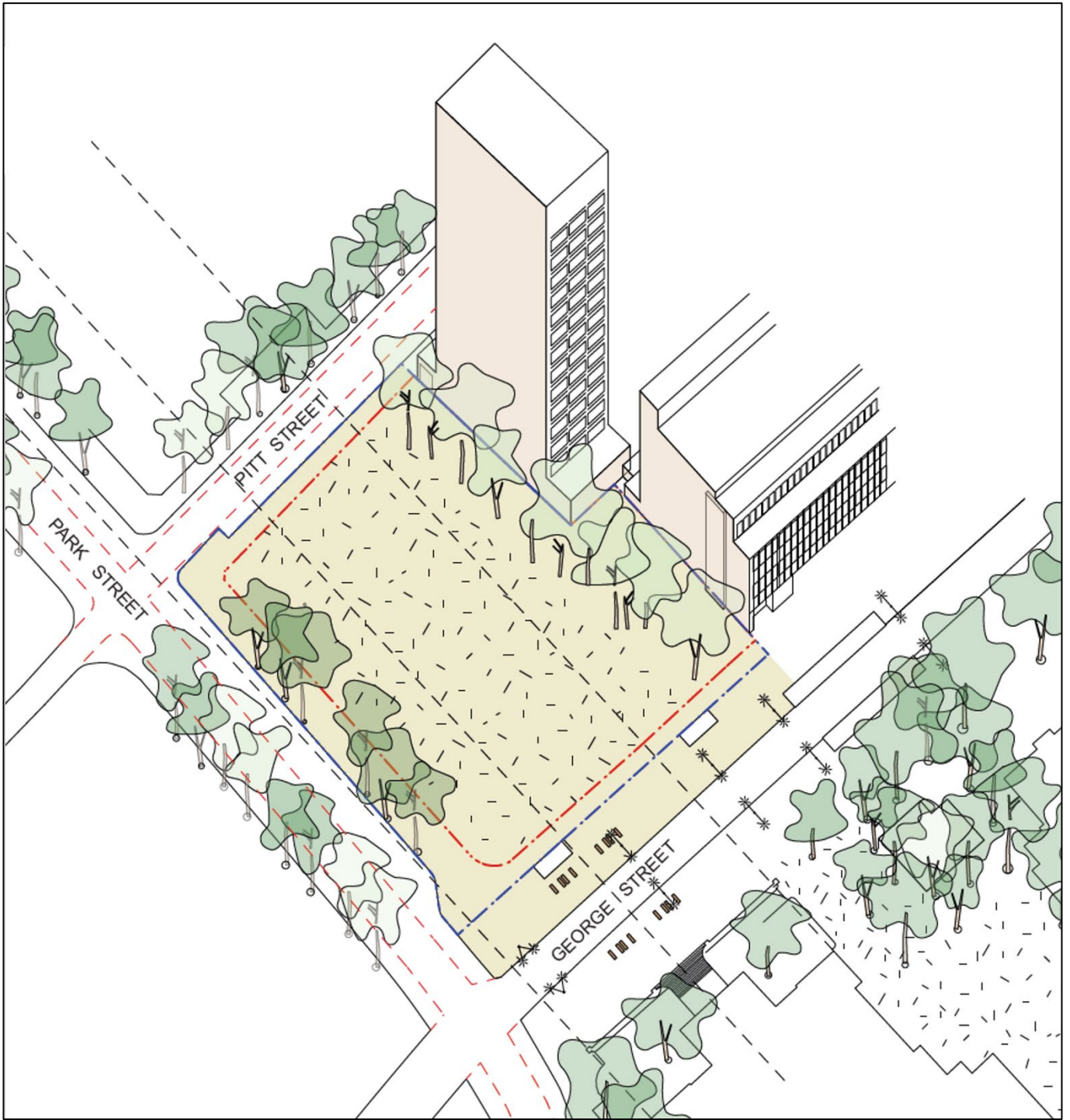


Figure 4 | Indicative site context (Source: CoS Project Scope – Town Hall Square)

The following works are excluded from the project scope:

- construction of any buildings, basements or public toilets.
- underground pedestrian connection to the Sydney Metro, Town Hall Station and/or QVB.

3 Strategic context

The Department has considered the proposal against several key strategic planning documents and considers it is consistent with the relevant strategic plans, policies and strategies as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 | Summary of key government strategies, plans and policies

Strategy, plan or policy	Comments
NSW State Land Use Plan and The Sydney Plan	The Sydney Plan includes responses to the priorities established in the NSW State Land Use Plan. The proposed development is consistent with the following responses: • Response 5: Create a more vibrant Sydney. • Response 7: Grow and connect public open space.
City Plan 2036: Local strategic planning statement (the LSPS)	The LSPS establishes the vision for the Sydney LGA to 2036 and includes planning priorities to support the vision. The proposal is consistent with the following planning priorities from the LSPS: • Planning Priority I3: Supporting community wellbeing with social infrastructure. • Planning Priority L1: A creative and socially connected city. • Planning Priority L2: Creating great places. The Department considers that the site has strategic merit given potential impacts on a culturally and commercially significant part of the Sydney CBD.
Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision	Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision provides the vision for the sustainable development of the LGA to 2050. It identifies 10 strategic directions to guide that development. The proposal aligns with the following strategic directions and objectives: • Direction 3 - Public places for all. • Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development. • Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport. • Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life and creative life.

4 Statutory context

4.1 Call-In Power

Section 4.36 of the EP&A Act provides that the Minister may, by order published on the NSW Planning Portal, declare specified development on specified land to be SSD, but only if the Minister has obtained and made publicly available advice from the Commission about the State or regional planning significance of the development.

4.2 Permissibility

The site is zoned SP5 Metropolitan Centre. Recreation areas are permissible with consent.

4.3 Planning Pathway

The proposal would not meet the criteria for SSD under Schedule 1, section 13 of State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) 2021 (Planning Systems SEPP), as the new public square would not be considered a recreation facility (major) with an estimated development cost of more than \$30 million.

However, given the cultural and commercial significance of the site for the Sydney CBD and the cost of the development, being \$150 million, and elements of the proposal being consistent with a number of the types of development under that section, the Department considers that it would align with the cultural, recreation and tourist facility types of development that would be normally be considered to be SSD.

5 Consideration of Call-In

The Minister has requested the Commission consider six issues when providing advice to the Minister to determine the State significance or regional planning significance of a development proposal. The Department's consideration of the issues is provided in **Table 3**.

Table 3 | Consideration of six issues prescribed by the Guideline

Issue	Department's Consideration
1. Whether the proposal is of regional or State importance because it is in an identified strategic location, or is critical in advancing the nominated strategic direction or achieving a nominated strategic outcome, contained in a relevant State policy, plan or strategy, or regional or sub-regional strategy;	The Department considers that the site's location is of strategic importance due it being the centre of the Sydney CBD and a significant transport intersection and near the culturally and heritage significant Sydney Town Hall and its steps. Furthermore, as outlined in Section 3, the Department considers the project is consistent with the strategic planning framework, particularly priorities relating to providing public spaces and ensuring a liveable city.
2. Whether the proposal delivers major public benefits such as large-scale essential transport, utility infrastructure, or social services to the community;	The project delivers major public benefits through the provision of a large public open space that would improve access and permeability between public transport modes. The Department also recognises that the proposal would provide additional infrastructure to support additional civic and community events, which would also support tourism.
3. Whether the proposal is likely to have significant environmental, social or economic impacts or benefits, be of a significant hazardous or environmentally-polluting nature, or is located in or in close proximity to areas or locations that have State or regional environmental, archaeological or cultural heritage significance;	The Department considers that the project is likely to have significant social and economic impacts given it is located in a culturally and commercially significant part of the CBD. The Department considers that the project is unlikely to have significant environmental impacts given it is located centrally within the CBD and proposes to enhance the greenery of the site.
4. Whether the proposal is of significant economic benefit to a region, the State or the national economy, such as those with	The proposal would result in a \$150 million investment into a civic space and would potentially have indirect investment benefits from the overall improved Town Hall

Issue	Department's Consideration
high levels of financial investment and continuing or long-term employment generation;	Public Domain and support of events and tourism, but would have economic impacts from the loss of the commercial spaces that would also need to be carefully considered as part of any future application.
5. Whether the proposal is geographically broad in scale, including whether it crosses over multiple council and other jurisdiction boundaries, or impacts a wide area beyond one local government area;	The site is not considered geographically broad in scale. The site is however significant for the region and the State given its prominence and cultural significance within the LGA and the State. This is due to a large number of visitors and users of the area coming from beyond the LGA and community interest to date.
6. Whether the proposal is complex, unique or multi-faceted and requires specialist expertise or State coordinated assessment, including where councils require or request State assistance.	The project is complex as it has potential to impact significant state-owned transport infrastructure adjacent to three of the site boundaries. The light rail and heavy rail lines run along George Street (above and below ground), the cross-city tunnel runs below Park Street, bus routes and bus stops are located along Park Street and the metro runs below Pitt Street. The Department has extensive experience in coordinating assessment of major recreation facilities and culturally significant sites.

6 Conclusion

The Department considers the proposal is State significant and would be appropriate to call-in as SSD because:

- the proposal is consistent with State strategic policies and directions, including the NSW State Land Use Plan, The Sydney Plan, City Plan 2036: Local strategic planning statement and Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision.
- the proposal has an estimated development cost (EDC) of approximately \$150 million and generally aligns with the cultural, recreation and tourist facility types of development that are SSD under Schedule 1, section 13 of the Planning Systems SEPP.
- the proposal would provide major public benefits through the provision of a large public open space that would improve access and permeability between public transport modes as well as additional infrastructure to support additional civic and community events.
- the proposal has the potential for significant social and economic impacts, being located opposite the Sydney Town Hall, centrally in the Sydney CBD and at a major public transport intersection.
- complexity of the assessment in relation to State owned infrastructure would benefit from a State led assessment.
- the proposal has an EDC of approximately \$150 million, bringing economic benefits to the region as well as indirect benefits from supporting events and tourism.

7 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Independent Planning Commission:

- **considers** the Department's evaluation as outlined in **Section 6** of this report.
- **provide** advice on the State or regional significance of the proposal in accordance with the six general criteria relating to State or regional significance.
- **provide** advice to assist the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces in his decision on whether or not to call-in the proposal as State significant development.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Project scope – Town Hall Square Proposal