Central business district should continue to be a major focus

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THE great cities of the world have at their heart a vibrant and active central business area.

Central areas busy with consumers, diners, workers and residents. Despite the very best of intentions, Ballarat, a great regional city, has a great deal of work to create this convivial environment.

So the announcement yesterday that the Ballarat Technology Park would open a central campus at Federation University’s Brewery Building is an important piece of the puzzle to invigorate southern aspects of the city’s CBD.

Premier Denis Napthine – in desperate need for positive jobs news – explained the central campus would be used to attract technology-based enterprises, including start-ups, new and emerging entrepreneurs and established small-to-medium enterprises expanding or relocating to the region.

Also to be relocated to the Brewery Building is the Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Institute (FECRI), which has operated since its inception in offices at the St John of God Hospital site.

Bringing new opportunities into the city centre can create the activity on which associated business can thrive.

It’s no coincidence that the Ballarat Tech Park is taking this opportunity, as the centre was born through the Federation University site in Mt Helen. The university already has a city campus, bringing arts students to learn and live in the city’s heart, and it’s clear the benefits to it and to the broader population are not lost on its leadership.

Dr Napthine said the investment would create 200 jobs. If he’s right, that’s a considerable downpayment in the future expansion of technology-based industry in Ballarat. It’s a step to coming good on the promise that we aspire to being a smart city.

With all the bad news being delivered on the Victorian jobs front, city leaders should take comfort that Ballarat has in its future opportunities in new frontiers and that we stand to benefit from being ahead of our competitors in this regard.

The challenge is to create further investment to bring new jobs but also to support the ones we already have.

The central business district should continue to be a focus in the eyes of government.