

## **Application**

Powerhouse Ultimo Renewal, Application No.: SSD-32927319

## **Objector's Name and Address**

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42 Botany Street, Kingsford, NSW, 2032

## **Statement of Objection**

I wish to lodge my objection in the strongest possible terms to the current proposal for the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, SSD-32927319, which, if implemented in its current form, will, in my opinion, destroy the museum and its proud, long and internationally recognised tradition of scientific and arts-based research, curatorial and design excellence, exhibitions and publications, and last, but by no means least, its allure for generations of Sydney-siders and visitors to this great city.

## **My reasons for objecting to the proposed development**

I started my museum and heritage conservation career at the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences (MAAS) back in 1973 and was inspired by the museum to do a Master's degree in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester in the UK at a time when no such postgraduate training was available in Australia. My return to MAAS was unfortunately short-lived as the NSW Government decided to discontinue the museum's long and highly regarded involvement in botanical and phytochemical research into Australia's flora. I then went on to a long and rewarding career in heritage conservation and museums, firstly in the NSW Public Service and, for the past 31 years, in private practice as a heritage practitioner.

For the past several years I have watched the ongoing proposals for re-imagining, renewal, adaptation (call it what you will that seems to fit at the time) of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo through changes of NSW Premier, relevant Minister, Board of Trustees membership, Conservation Management Plan (CMP) consultants (We must seriously question why Design 5 was replaced by Curio Projects), staff and more changes in direction, curtilage and final purpose and content than can be easily remembered.

The current proposal, if implemented, will, in my opinion, trash the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo as a museum, per se, and as a museum of international reputation. The purpose and use of the new development has not been driven by the best practice standards of investigation, research, and due diligence that a museum of such international significance and reputation deserves. The principles and guidelines of Australia ICOMOS and ICCROM have been sidestepped or completely ignored. These high standards should have been employed in heritage conservation, collection management and curatorial excellence, and respect for the historical, associational, technical, industrial, and social significance, and recognised architectural excellence of the 1980s adaptation of the former Ultimo Powerhouse and the former Ultimo tram depot

The current proposal has not been informed by museological excellence but has been driven by the wishes of a powerful sectional lobby group and compliant NSW Government bent on reducing the footprint of the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo to free up development space and produce an ill-defined centre for design, fashion and goodness knows what else. A wealth of well-considered professional advice of international, national, and local experts in museums, architecture and curatorial excellence has largely been ignored, as have the wishes of experts and the community to protect in situ the world-famous collection of objects including the 1785 Boulton and Watt rotative steam engine (driven by steam, as intended), Locomotive No.1 and its rolling stock and the Catalina flying boat.

Together with the ill-conceived and widely discredited Powerhouse Parramatta project that is said to have started life as a former Premier's thought bubble (a thought bubble that should have been pricked before it hit the ground) and the expanded Museums Discovery Centre (MDC) at Castle Hill, the current proposal for Powerhouse Ultimo, if implemented, will destroy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences as a museum of international repute, replacing it with something that will not be a museum at all. It is fitting that the word 'museum' has been mentioned less and less as this proposal has progressed. The NSW Government might as well call the new development 'The thing at Ultimo' and that 'Other thing at Parramatta'.

The people of NSW should be questioning why there has been so much opacity in the evolution of the Powerhouse Museum renewal proposals and who is ultimately pulling the strings that have allowed these ill-considered and disgraceful proposals to survive for so long through changes in Premier and Minister and against all best practice principles and guidelines in heritage conservation and museum excellence.

At a time when New South Wales is facing economic downturn, with bushfire and flood victims still waiting for overdue assistance, aged care homes and hospitals overwhelmed by the surge in the Covid-19 pandemic, public transport problems, and multiple, more deserving demands for infrastructure repairs, it would be immoral and unconscionable for the NSW Government to waste any more public funds on the Powerhouse Ultimo project or its love child on a flood-prone site at Parramatta.

It is time to put a stop to this nonsense and let sound minds prevail for a complete re-evaluation and redesign of the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo proposal, with fully transparent business planning, to retain the museum as a real museum on the total site that includes the former Ultimo Powerhouse, the Wran Building and the Harwood Building that provides essential onsite support for the museum.

In the meantime, keep the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo open with a temporary exhibition program that uses the museum's wonderful and varied collection that is largely in storage at MDC Castle Hill. Come back to the renewal of the museum when the proper homework has been done and when funds are really available, not desperately needed for more deserving and urgent purposes such as natural disaster relief, health care and infrastructure repair.

#### **Declaration of any reportable political donations**

I declare that I am making this submission as a concerned private citizen of New South Wales, not as a representative of any political party, organisation, or community group. I declare that I have not made any reportable political donations in the last two years. I am happy for my name to appear on my submission.

Signed:



Chris Betteridge

28 July 2022