

Annika Hather
Principal Planning Officer
Key Sites Assessments
Department of Planning, Housing, and Infrastructure
By email: Annika.Hather@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Annika,

SSD-67588459 – Environmental Impact Statement – Powerhouse Ultimo Revitalisation

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and my objections to the SSD-67588459 — Powerhouse Ultimo Revitalisation.

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”¹

The revised proposal for the Powerhouse Ultimo site at 494-500 Harris Street, Ultimo suggests not only changes to the structures of the building but also to the use of the Powerhouse Museum.

The revised approach will change the external elements of the heritage buildings and it may improve the public domain with the provision of integrated landscaped public open spaces and improved connectivity with pedestrian, Light Rail and Goods Line access.

I object to the removal of the key internal components of the heritage structures and the decoupling the Harwood building that serves the Powerhouse Museum’s function, in order to achieve the “revitalised heritage” or “refreshed” aims of this SSD-67588459 plan.

I can only support retaining the use of the Powerhouse Museum and the Harwood building as a united complex that performs WHOLLY as a MUSEUM and not as “an information and education facility.”²

Over nine years, there has been overwhelming community pressure through submission objections, protests, written reports and submissions to every NSW Government “infrastructure” proposal for change. The community have demonstrated their objections to the NSW Government “incarnations of change” for our beloved Powerhouse museum.

This community response demonstrates the value and importance of this cultural public institution and asset the broader social, cultural, and economic activity of not only the local Pyrmont Peninsula community but also to the broader NSW and Australian community concerned about the characteristic elements and fundamental function of the Powerhouse Museum.

Every submission that I have put to-date, has been to OPPOSE NSW Government proposals that alter the fundamental function and form of our Powerhouse Museum.

I agree with the City of Sydney’s submission that the “Community feedback highlights the connection they have with the current exhibition space and the need to ensure that future upgrades respect and reflect what is currently there... It should be ensured that there is no reduction in exhibition space.”

Also, it must be emphasised and is understood by the public, the total site belonging to our Powerhouse Museum is clearly greater than the SHR listing, which includes buildings and structures outlined in “1. Heritage 1.1. Relevant Listings, of the City of Sydney’s submission.

¹ <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

² ANDREW THOMAS, Executive Manager, City Planning and Development

And whilst the Harwood Building (former Tram Shed building location) is not subject to the SSD-67588459 application, I strenuously object to the separation of Land Titles and the “decoupling” of the Harwood Building’s function and relationship to the Powerhouse Museum. It’s role in supporting the museum is clearly defined and this “revitalisation” proposal must not be the impetus for redevelopment into any “potential future use for exhibition and cultural spaces” because of its necessity in maintaining the museum collection, creating exhibits and museum research etc.

I object to the demolition of any part of the Wran building without the considered City of Sydney’s investigation of the entire Powerhouse Museum site for heritage significance.³ From the proposal, it is clear that the community will have a reduction of museum space.

The City of Sydney must be able to present to the public, the independent findings with opportunities for the City of Sydney and the public to provide further submissions about the heritage assessment particularly if the investigation indicates heritage impacts not currently identified in the application.

I strongly support the City of Sydney’s submission statement that “Lionel Glendenning, the architect of the Wran Building... be approached as part of the Commonwealth’s Moral Rights obligation to ensure the proposed design changes are consulted with him, given such extensive changes are now proposed to the retained building.”

In fact, I find it morally reprehensible that Mr Glendenning is not included in the decision-making of this “revitalisation” proposal.

And I feel that it is an ethical concern that the NSW Government has ignored and/or excluded Mr Glendenning and other eminent persons connected to the welfare of our Powerhouse Museum.

I support the City of Sydney’s submission concerns and requests to retain the remnant Goods Line track.

I object to the new building along Harris Street that will obstruct “the views from Harris Street to the historic core that retains the legibility of the heritage items and this retention of views which are an important attribute of the 1980s Powerhouse Museum design” and “the importance of retaining adequate visual curtilage around eastern side of the Wran building,” as highlighted by the City of Sydney’s submission.

I object to any works and changes to the heritage listed buildings that would increase the external envelope and floor space of the building.

I object to the lack of detail in this SSD-67588459 application, around the adaptive reuse of the Wran Hall. Demolition plans do not clearly show all sections such as the intention for the arch of the roof form and so, more detailed plans should be presented to the public for comment, in plan, elevation and section.

At this point, I wish to comment upon any collaborations or partnerships with organisations that seek to change the fundamental purpose and use of our Powerhouse Museum and who may directly benefit from the “revitalisation” plans. Whilst a “partnership” with various entities may exist and/or be sought to bolster the contribution that the museum may have to it’s users - I object to any shift from the charter of the Powerhouse Museum as a museum. In particular, I object to it becoming “a creative industries academy as an immersive education and professional hub to connect students with industry leaders... renewing its focus to that of fashion and design.”⁴

³ On the 15th of May 2023, the Council of the City of Sydney resolved, amongst other matters relating to Supporting the Powerhouse, that the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate the entire Powerhouse Museum site for heritage significance. Since that time, the City has engaged the firm Lovell Chen Architects to carry out a heritage assessment of the site which is still in progress.

⁴ Submission by Nigel Oliver, Director, Property, University of Technology Sydney

Any collaboration and therefore benefit to an institution, must not supersede the fundamental and universal role of the Powerhouse Museum to the general public.

It is the explicit role of an educational institution to draw from the community and present opportunities to its students, interpretations of the industry or event experience. However, it is not the educational institution's privilege to shape and alter the culture, heritage, and use of the museum space. I am highly critical of the intentions and benefits of the UTS relationship (or any other collaborator), with our Powerhouse museum if it is wielding any influence on what should be, the independent program of this revered museum.

I support the retention of the Powerhouse Museum site as the world class Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences museum of technology for the community. In doing so, the revitalised Powerhouse should provide the same amount, if not more, of exhibition space.

Respectfully

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.

Please keep my personal details confidential