

Renah Givney
Planner
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
PO BOX 404, PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

By email: renah.givney@dpie.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Givney

Notice of Exhibition of application for Powerhouse Ultimo Renewal (SSD-32927319)

Thank you for your referral dated 15 June 2022 inviting comments from the Heritage Council of NSW on the above State Significant Development (SSD) proposal.

The proposed SSD affects the State Heritage Register (SHR) items, Ultimo Powerhouse (SHR no 02045) and former Ultimo Post Office buildings (SHR No 00502).

The Heritage Council of NSW has a longstanding interest in the heritage listing, use and ongoing development of this special place. On behalf of the Council, I thank the Department for the opportunity to provide initial comments on this development proposal.

Please note that this response is from Heritage NSW as an agency and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Heritage Council of NSW. The Council wishes to formally discuss the proposal at its next available meeting cycle, and will rely on the opportunity to formally comment through next stages in the planning process.

The Ultimo Powerhouse was one of the largest and most important generating stations in NSW. It was the first large state-owned electricity generating station in NSW supplying electricity to the electric tramway network throughout Sydney. Its transition from a major industrial location to a cultural, educational and tourism precinct played a major part in the wider heritage conservation movement in NSW. The redevelopment project was recognised with several awards - its fabric, form and uses are held in demonstrable public esteem by engineers, architects, museum associates and the wider public.

The following reports were considered in our assessment:

- *Powerhouse Ultimo – Draft Conservation Management Plan*, prepared by Curio Projects, dated May 2022
- *Powerhouse, Ultimo Renewal – Environmental Impact Assessment*, prepared by Ethos Urban, dated 26 May 2022
- *Appendix B – Urban Design Report*, prepared by John Wardle Architects & Aspect Studios, dated 25 May 2022
- *Appendix C – Architectural Drawings*, prepared by John Wardle Architects, dated May 2022
- *Appendix D – Landscape Drawings*, prepared by Aspect Studios, dated May 2022
- *Appendix E – Design Excellence Strategy*, prepared by Ethos Urban, dated May 2022
- *Appendix I – Heritage Impact Statement*, prepared by Curio Projects, dated May 2022
- *Appendix L – Preliminary Arboricultural Report*, prepared by Tree IQ, dated 3 May 2022

- *Appendix X – Consultation Outcomes Report*, prepared by Ethos Urban, dated May 2022
- *Appendix Z - Historical Archaeological Assessment*, prepared by Curio Projects, dated May 2022

No physical works are proposed as part of this Concept SSDA, however consent is sought for the following:

- A maximum building envelope for any new buildings and alterations or additions to existing buildings retained on the site.
- Use of the site as an 'information and education facility' including museum exhibition and learning spaces that are supported by a range of ancillary and related uses contributing to the operation of Powerhouse Ultimo.
- A Design Excellence Strategy and Urban Design Guidelines to guide the next stages of the project.
- An updated Draft Conservation Management Plan to ensure that future development occurs in a manner that is compatible with and facilitates the conservation of the heritage values of the site.
- General functional parameters for the future design and operation of the site including principles and strategies for the management of heritage, transport and access, noise and vibration, utilities and services, and the like.

Due to high profile, potentially major alterations & additions and public visibility of the project, it is considered that comments on this development should come from the Approvals Committee of the Heritage Council of NSW. However, as the meeting timeframe does not allow such consultation, the following comments are provided. Notwithstanding, this application has been listed on the Agenda for the August meeting of the Approvals Committee. The applicant is invited to present the proposal to the Committee to seek further comments prior to providing a response to submissions.

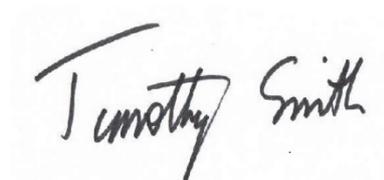
- The documentation clearly states due to the presence of significant heritage buildings, a **maximum building envelope** would not be achievable across the entire site. Therefore, it is unclear why consent is sought for a blanket maximum building height envelope across the entire site. It is recommended that the maximum building height envelope be restricted to areas where the new development is envisaged. This would ensure that the curtilage and forms of the state listed elements within the project site are best protected.
- Any additional building height under the provisions of **4.6 clause variation** requires further consideration. As mentioned above, it is desirable that any extension of the building height envelope above the extant state listed buildings be deleted to ensure that the buildings retain historic roof planes and forms, as an initial premise.
- It is understood that the current documentation and reference scheme has been developed to ensure that **maximum flexibility is allowed during the design excellence** stage of the project. It should, however, be emphasised that flexibility at the cost of potentially significant adverse impacts to the SHR listed buildings on site is undesirable and may not be supported at building design stage.
- Any design intervention, particularly any new built forms or provision of new public domain areas should **consider the significant heritage facades**. The reference scheme diagrams indicate that built up areas would be aligned with and abut adjacent historic facades. It is considered that the reference scheme block diagrams located in the forecourts along Harris Street and Goods Line provides reasonable set backs to ensure that any development as part of the renewal project includes an appreciation of the significant heritage facades.

- It is recommended that a review of the documentation be undertaken to ensure that all building diagrams clearly reflect that the heritage facades along the Harris Street forecourt and the Goods Line public domain area are of particular importance and that **any new development should be setback** to ensure their clear legibility.
- It is noted that the direct view from Harris Street to the heritage items was established as part of the 1980s museum redevelopment of the site. However, these views have played an integral role in the legibility of the site. It is therefore, recommended that the **views to the historic core** are retained from some aspects of Harris Street and play a role in any design response that is envisaged. Further, it is considered that any development located within this area would not have a *neutral visual impact on the heritage values of the site*. It is, therefore, recommended that any documentation submitted as part of the subsequent stages of approval, clearly assess the impact of any design iteration upon the heritage values of the site from this viewpoint.
- The proposed renewal envisages the **reorientation of the Museum** from Harris Street to the former rail Goods Line. This is supported in principle; however, it is recommended that any new development within this eastern precinct, including new built or public domain works, be designed with enough setback and of a scale to ensure the legibility of the historic buildings, their historical uses and interconnections .
- The documentation indicates that the reorientation of the museum entrance would allow the introduction of a new public square along the Goods Line and Macarthur Street intersection. However, the reference scheme includes a multistory built-up area above this public square. It is considered that any development at this junction should have regard to the legibility of the existing buildings and their heritage values (as above). It is considered that the **public domain areas** envisaged as part of the renewal proposal retain clear open to sky spaces without the burden of built areas above.
- The reference scheme envisages that the views at Harris Street and William Henry Street intersection and The Goods Line and Macarthur Street intersection public domains would result in the highest change with considerable impact. Simultaneously, these **views also form an integral relationship between the current heritage presentation and the surrounding context**. It is noted that the documentation rates the impact of the building envelope and reference scheme as low to moderate at these intersections. However, not enough evidence or supporting documentation has been provided to confirm this statement. Further information and assessment of impacts should be presented as part of any future applications to demonstrate how the impacts are being mitigated.
- While the removal of later addition intrusive interiors from within the heritage buildings is generally considered acceptable, further details and assessment of impact should form part of any future development proposals. It is considered that **only essential amendments and intervention be made within the listed SHR curtilage**.
- The **draft conservation management plan** has been considered as part of this application. This does not constitute an endorsement.
- Improved **heritage interpretation** across the site, particularly Connections to Country, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage values, the history of the Powerhouse and its evolution is considered to be a positive heritage outcome and is supported.
- As the site contains a local heritage item, and other local items are in the vicinity, **advice should be sought from the relevant local council**.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. Heritage NSW will endeavour to refer any additional commentary from the Heritage Council of NSW, once they have had to opportunity to review the proposal at their next available meeting.

If you have any questions regarding the above advice, please contact Mariyam Nizam, Senior Assessments Officer, at Heritage NSW on 88376375 or Mariyam.Nizam@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Tim Smith OAM
Director, Assessments
Heritage NSW
Department of Planning and Environment
11/7/22