

Our ref: HMS ID 6271

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Notice of Exhibition of application for an Environmental Impact Statement for the Powerhouse Ultimo Revitalisation (SSD-67588459)

Dear Ms Hather,

Thank you for your referral dated 2 May 2024 inviting comments from the Heritage Council of NSW (Heritage Council) on the Powerhouse Ultimo Revitalisation (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).

Furthermore, the proposal would affect the expanded curtilage of the Powerhouse Museum Complex as recommended by the Heritage Council on 8 May 2024. Additions to the existing SHR item would include the forecourt, Wran building, Harwood building and former Ultimo Post Office. It should be noted that site specific exemptions for the Wran Building as recommended by the Heritage Council allow for changes to internal layouts, fittings and furnishings constructed post 1980 to support function of the Powerhouse Museum Complex.

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 updated Statement of Significance, as recommended by the Heritage Council, recognises the broader Powerhouse Museum (PHM) Complex and its heritage values. It states that its adaptive reuse as the Powerhouse Museum in 1981 and 1988, including the Hardwood and Wran buildings (respectively), has State historic, social, and associative significance. Aboriginal Cultural values of the places are also recognised as a potential source of pre and early contact information and as a marker of 1980s protests by Aboriginal people.

The Heritage Council considered the SSD proposal and all relevant supporting documents as exhibited on the [NSW Major Projects website](#) at our meeting on 5 June 2024, and provides the following comments:

Built Heritage – Design and Interpretation

- The proposed conservation and adaptive reuse of the existing Ultimo Power House and Ultimo Post Office heritage items for museum purposes is supported.
- Retention of the curved roof form and scale of the Wran Building is supported.

The proposed interpretation and celebration of the Wran building's design intent, its architecture and history in the proposed scheme is supported. It is recommended that the 'Powerhouse Museum Design Principles: Lionel Glendenning & Richard Hohnson' document prepared by Design 5, as included in the 2022 Conservation Management Plan, should guide aspects of the revitalisation project to enable this. It is further recommended that interpretation should extend to key design elements and façade treatment, not just be limited to the curved roof form.

- The final design of the new museum addition along Harris Street will reduce any remaining views of the historic core from the corner of Harris and Macarthur Streets. The design should ensure that the facades to the new building are made more visually permeable to mitigate visual impacts. An updated Statement of Heritage Impact along with a revised Visual Impact Assessment demonstrating the impact of the final design could resolve and address these design issues.
- The final design should have regard to the legibility of the Wran building as perceived from the surrounding context and include appropriate setbacks. The use of common materials (recycled and reconstituted brick, stone and concrete) across both the Wran facades and the new addition along Harris Street is not supported. The Wran building reflects the distinct 1988 adaptive reuse development of the site as the PHM and the design should recognise this in terms of its external treatment/materiality. Further, it is claimed that the way the brickwork on the Harris St façade will be used reflects the geology/stratigraphy of the location of the PHM pre-settlement. How this is to be achieved requires greater explanation and tangible links to Connecting with Country principles.
- The public domain works including the Post Office courtyard, the Museum Entry Terrace, and the Harris Street public areas are supported.
- The proposed Aboriginal co-design of the revitalised museum (including contributions to built, public domain and landscape designs) are supported. These collaborations should extend to museum programs and engage local Aboriginal community and traditional owners to further integrate the design process and use of the place with the Connection with Country.
- Recommendations under Section 8.2 of the Heritage Impact Statement are supported including a comprehensive archival recording of the site comprising a photographic archival recording and 3-d scanning of the site in its current form, prior to its redevelopment.

Moveable Heritage

- While the Power House Museum Collection is not covered by the current SHR listing or the amended SHR listing as recommended by the Heritage Council on 8 May, it remains an integral part of the Power House Museum Complex. The inter-relationship of the purpose-built Museum and its permanent displays is relevant.

The application should clearly demonstrate the ability to adequately accommodate the Museum's operations and curatorial display including all the permanent displays.

Historic Archaeology

- The final design must be informed by the findings of test excavations. The results of the test excavations should be used to inform decision-making, and identify appropriate conservation

outcomes and mitigation measures, commensurate with the assessed significance of the identified archaeological resource. It is advised that the current approach for the management of State significant archaeology is preservation and conservation in situ, as a preferred heritage outcome.

- The Historical Archaeological Research Design and Excavation Methodology (HARDEM) should be updated as follows:
 - Section 5.4 (Assessment of Historical Archaeological Potential) – the assessment of potential for Phases 1 and 2 is ‘low to moderate’. This appears to be inconsistent with the potential presented in Figure 5-2, where a substantial area of moderate to high potential is indicated. This apparent discrepancy should be rectified.
 - Clearly indicate where it is proposed to undertake Aboriginal archaeological test excavations, and detail how the historical and Aboriginal archaeological testing programs will interact.
 - Include the demolition plan, and detail how potential impacts of demolition, decontamination, etc. on the potential archaeological resource will be avoided.
 - Consider the inclusion of an artefact discard policy and procedure.
 - Indicate how it is proposed to avoid subsurface impacts to the water-cooling system and manifold.
 - Include clear triggers and hold points for the identification of substantially intact (and potentially State significant) archaeological deposits/relics. The hold points should require, and allow for, consideration of redesign to avoid impacts. We would appreciate an opportunity to comment on the proposed management approach decided upon by the proponent.
 - If open-area salvage excavation is recommended as mitigation, based on the results of the testing, an Addendum to the HARDEM, which details the proposed salvage excavations and methodology, should be developed in consultation with Heritage NSW.
 - The results of any archaeological investigations undertaken should be incorporated into the Heritage Interpretation Plan, which should be developed in consultation with Heritage NSW.

The Heritage Council has a longstanding interest in the heritage listing, use and ongoing development of the Powerhouse Museum (PHM) Complex, and welcomes further opportunities to provide comments on the detailed design and updated documents to address the points raised in this letter. Heritage interpretation of the history of the site and built form will be critical and further input is requested as the interpretation plan develops.

As the site contains local heritage items, and other local items are in the vicinity, advice should also be sought from the relevant local council.

If you have any questions about this correspondence, please contact Shikha Jhaldiyal, Senior Assessments Officer, at Heritage NSW on (02) 9873 8500 or heritagemailbox@environment.nsw.gov.au

Yours sincerely



Frank Howarth OM PSM
Chair, Heritage Council of NSW

7 June 2024