

To:  
NSW PLANNING PORTAL

*Ultimo, 16 July, 2022*

**POWERHOUSE ULTIMO RENEWAL  
STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION  
SSD-32927319**

**SUBMISSION**

We write to **OPPOSE** the misnamed “Powerhouse Ultimo *Renewal*” State Significant Development (SSD) application currently on exhibition at <https://pp.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-renewal>. We believe that the objective of this project, as the community demands, should be a Powerhouse Museum “**REVIVAL**”, ie to restore the museum to its former imposing status as a world-leading Applied Arts and Sciences Museum, not to completely change and degrade it through the so-called “Renewal” proposed.

We will detail the reasons for our opposition in this document but, first wish **to register our objections** to the fact that the public was given only 28 days to comment on an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) containing 39 documents and totalling more than 2,000 pages. This exhibition follows a series of blatantly biased “community information sessions” in March and July.

“Save the Powerhouse” is a community campaign against the threatened destruction of the Powerhouse **Museum** in Ultimo. We advocate maintaining the institution’s current function as the world-class leading Science and Technology **Museum** in Australia. Our campaign was established in Ultimo after a public meeting on 20-03-2015, following former Premier Mike Baird’s announcement that the Powerhouse would be moved to Parramatta. Its convenors are Ultimo residents who also lead the “Friends of Ultimo”, a community action group that addresses local issues. We communicate with supporters via a Facebook page (5,000+ followers) and bulk emailing. We are not museum experts, but aim to keep the general public informed, and represent their views about the Powerhouse issue to other groups, politicians, local leaders and the media. Our actions to date include

- Helping to collect 10,000+ signatures on a Parliamentary petition which opened the way for a Parliamentary debate on 28-10-2015
- Organising meetings and rallies addressed by
  - Federal, State and Local Government representatives
  - Museum experts including Powerhouse Museum’s founding Director Dr Lindsay Sharp, former Powerhouse Deputy Director Jennifer Sanders, Museums Consultant Kylie Winkworth and Sulman Prize winning Powerhouse Museum Architect Lionel Glendening.

- Regularly meeting and liaising with the Powerhouse Museum Alliance (PMA) and the North Parramatta Action Group (NPRAG)
  - regularly meeting and collaborating with politicians and museum experts.
- We also made submissions and testified twice at the ongoing Upper House Inquiry into Museums and Galleries.

## **-1- THE EIS AND THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN COMPETITION TO FOLLOW ARE PREMATURE**

Although we understand that an informal decision to transform the current **Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences** (MAAS) into a **Fashion and Design Information and Education Facility** (no longer a museum) has been taken, this decision has not been made official and **the general public has never been consulted**.

It is therefore premature (and makes little sense) to exhibit the principles (stage 1) of the transformation of the museum built forms when its **future use is officially unknown**.

**NOTE:** The proposed transformation contradicts the now NSW Premier's announcement, two years ago, that "...the Powerhouse Museum would be staying in Ultimo, and continue to welcome visitors to its world renowned exhibits".

The media release stated that "the Powerhouse Museum would continue to provide an outstanding visitor experience **in the areas of technology, science, engineering and design**".

## **-2- THE PROPOSAL WOULD DOWNGRADE THE POWERHOUSE, NOT RENEW IT**

- 2.1 The proposal to transform the current **Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences** (MAAS) into a **Fashion And Design Information and Education Facility** (ie no longer a museum) constitutes a significant downgrading of the institution.

- 'Fashion and Design' are only a small part of Applied Arts.

- 'Fashion' targets a very narrow segment of the public and does not attract children, a traditionally large proportion of the Museum's visitors.

**They are the future Scientists of Australia.**

Downgrading the museum by turning it into a fashion and design "facility" will drastically **decrease visitation**.

**NOTE:** this is already obvious as the current Powerhouse dress, pottery & photographic exhibits attract little interest while the original technical sections are always full of family & school groups.

- 2.2 The transformation makes little sense since:

- The current Powerhouse Museum reflects Ultimo's proud industrial past. Ultimo has no fashion tradition and only a very limited design history.

- Ultimo has been designated as part of the **Innovation Corridor** under the government's current Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy (PPPS 2020).

Destroying Australia's unique Science and Technology Museum in the Sydney "Innovation Corridor" defeats the purpose.

- The majestic industrial halls with high ceilings of the Powerhouse heritage core are suited to large science and technology exhibitions whereas fashion displays require small, intimate spaces.

The size of the Powerhouse Museum is too large to be limited to a fashion and design "facility". The largest fashion museums in the world (Fashion & Textile London, Palais Galliera Paris) have exhibition spaces of approx. 2,000m<sup>2</sup> as opposed to more than 20,000m<sup>2</sup> in Ultimo.

Palais Galliera attracted 120,000 visitors in 2019 (pre-pandemic) as opposed to 757,000 to the Powerhouse in 2018-19.

### **-3- THE POWERHOUSE HERITAGE LISTING AND CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN ARE INADEQUATE**

#### **3.1 Heritage listing**

This project shows that the system of heritage protection in NSW is flawed. The politicised handling of the listing of the shell of the former Ultimo Power House (not the Powerhouse Museum), despite dozens of objections, is just one element in a process where Government agencies have shirked responsibility for the impartial assessment of places of heritage significance.

That includes MAAS and the failure of the NSW Heritage Council to consider the National Trust's listing proposal for the whole Powerhouse Museum site which was an integrated industrial heritage site and museological and design concept.

It is beyond belief that a treasured 142 year old cultural institution that has been in Ultimo since 1893 has no heritage protection.

#### **3.2 Conservation Management Plan**

The conservation management plan (CMP) prepared by Curio Projects (EIS Appendix G - Parts 1 to 9) is inadequate and does not reflect Lionel Glendenning's design principles.

- The Harwood building, Sydney's largest and oldest tram depot, which is an integral part of the PHM's history, heritage, design concept and functionality has no heritage protection at any level.

It is not even within the project scope

This contradicts the MAAS CEO's answer to Save the Powerhouse's question last year that *"The building will stay and be used as a support to the museum (for a "museum-related" activity)."*

- the CMP not only allows for the demolition of all traces of the Sulman award-winning Powerhouse (Wran Building and Galleria) but also allows the gutting of the heritage "core" whose adaptation was the inspiration for the Tate Modern in London, stating that the significance of the museum per se is purely local, and not "to a degree which warrants a (heritage) listing".

**NOTE:** Although The Wran Building and Galleria demolition is subject to the Architectural Competition result we obviously keep in mind **the fate of Willow Grove**, the Italianate villa in Parramatta, now destroyed, that former Premier Berejiklian had promised to safeguard!

- The CMP ignores the considerable significance of the permanent exhibitions:
  - Transport, Flight and Space, one of the world's great transport exhibitions,
  - Steam Revolution with steam engines working under live steam,
  - The majestic installation of the 1785 Boulton and Watt and No.1 loco and carriages in the Galleria, which was purpose-designed for these internationally significant

objects, and is the starting point for the PHM's underpinning narrative of innovation, engineering and design from the industrial revolution.

#### **-4- THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM DOES NOT NEED TO ACCOMMODATE “CREATIVE INDUSTRIES”**

The Powerhouse is to be redeveloped into a **creative industries precinct** with **subsidised artists' studios**, retail, cafes, and some fashion and design displays.

The Arts Minister stated that “as a cultural institution the Powerhouse has a responsibility to support creative industries in NSW” This is incorrect. According to Museum Expert Kylie Winkworth “it is not the purpose of a public museum to function as an industry development body ... Museums as permanent institutions must make careful long term judgements on their collection and exhibition program, independent of commercial and industry pressures. This distinction has escaped the MAAS CEO and Trust, and the Minister”.

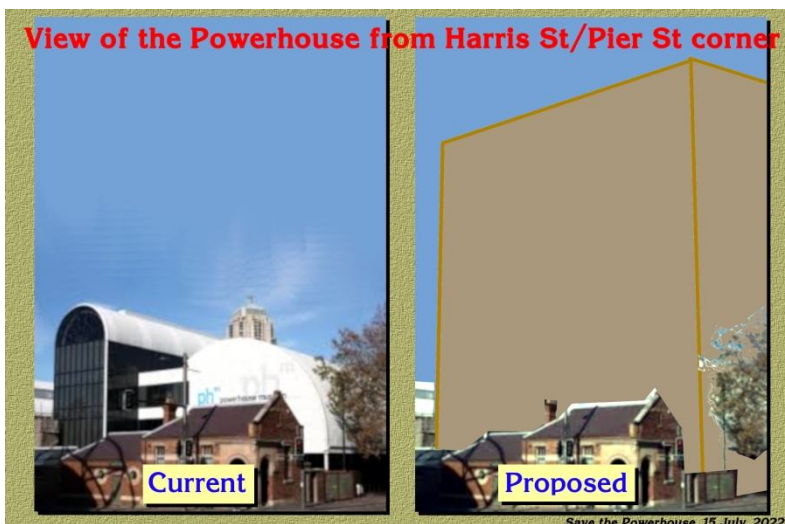
#### **-5- THE DA Stage 1 (envelope) IS INADEQUATE**

The Stage 1 (envelope) would authorise the chosen Architect to build a 25m building on the existing forecourt and to demolish the Wran Building and Galleria, replacing them with a 31m building.

The existing Harris St forecourt entrance would disappear.



This would result in new built forms dwarfing the heritage original Powerhouse buildings and the row of 3 storey buildings facing the Powerhouse across Harris St.



Furthermore, **the Powerhouse would turn its back on Ultimo, its traditional home since 1893.**

**NOTE:** The Sydney Local Environmental Plan LEP2012 (Height of Building - Sheet HOB\_008) lists the whole Powerhouse site (including the Harwood building) as T3 (28m). Hence a height of 31m is the maximum authorised for this site (28m+10% for design excellence).

The Land Zoning Map - Sheet LZN\_008 lists the site as a mere B4 (mixed use!).

The demolition of a large part of the site and its replacement by a building “achieving the full site potential” results from the concept of “**SITES CAPABLE OF CHANGE**” invented by the Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy (PPPS 2020).

Although no reasons or justification are provided, under this “Strategy” more than half of Ultimo is designated as “capable of change” and this first attempt at dramatically “changing” an internationally revered institution such as the Powerhouse confirms our fears that many more “changes” will be inflicted on the suburb (eg the Ultimo Community Centre is identified as “capable of change”!).

## **-6- CONCLUSION**

In summary, the Project is wasteful, destructive and unnecessary and should be rejected.

The architect of the Powerhouse Museum Lionel Glendenning **estimates the cost of genuine renewal of the Powerhouse Museum (including the Harwood Building), its exhibitions, infrastructure and public domain at \$250m.**

This includes clearing the building maintenance log after a decade of **deliberate neglect** by the NSW Government.

Any public money spent beyond this figure would only result in **destruction of value** which is contrary to the public interest.

The Powerhouse Museum opened in 1988 and was designed for a working life of more than 100 years. Trashing it after just 33 years would not be merely a **colossal waste of public money** but a **national tragedy**.

The Powerhouse Museum in its current form is a national treasure recognised and respected well beyond Australia. Its trashing would become an **international embarrassment** for NSW. The Government and Public Service of the day are merely the temporary caretakers of state public assets. They have no mandate to alter and degrade a **national treasure**.

In summary, Save the Powerhouse supports the fact that public funds should be used to restore the Powerhouse to its former glory, modernise its exhibition spaces using up-to-date technologies...and upgrade the **existing** Goodslane entrance.

But **Save the Powerhouse strongly opposes:**

- The degradation of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences into a fashion and design “facility”.
- The creation of new spaces for creative industries’ workshops, subsidised artists’ studios and accommodations.
- The exclusion of the Harwood building from the Powerhouse “renewal” project
- The demolition of the Wran Building and Galleria and their replacement by a new 31m building.
- The construction of a 25m new building on the existing Harris St forecourt.
- The closure of the Harris St entrance.
- The proposed separation of the ‘renewed museum’ from Ultimo, its home since 1883.

- The gutting of the Museum's heritage "core" and the removal of its permanent exhibitions (Transport, Flight and Space, Steam Revolution (working under live steam) and Strasbourg clock, Boulton and Watt and No.1 loco installation in the Galleria).

*Save the Powerhouse*



**Savethepowerhouse**