

OBJECTION - POWERHOUSE ULTIMO RENEWAL

Proposed Use

On the 4 July 2020 in a media statement, the then Premier, Gladys Berejiklian and now Premier, Dominic Perrottet gave the following undertaking in response to public concerns:

“Sydney’s Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo will continue to welcome visitors to the world renowned exhibits, with the NSW Government announcing today that it will remain open and operate alongside the new state-of-the-art facility being planned for Western Sydney.....Sydney is a global city of more than five million people and this will allow us to provide an outstanding visitor experience in the areas of technology, science, engineering and design at two major locations.”

In short, reiterating the Powerhouse’s role and reputation for its renowned exhibits and collections focused on innovation. Yet subsequent correspondence to the Project Leader Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy from the CEO for MAAS and Head of Create NSW indicates the plans were far from what was presented to the public.

Instead the letter suggests the plans to reframe the Museum as part of a late night Creative Precinct with the FBC were well on track; as were plans to excise the Harwood Building from the Powerhouse site with its future use and impact not understood by the public.

Now two years later, the application for the concept proposal confirms the mainstay of the Museum’s world renowned exhibits will be moved out to the Museum’s Discovery Centre at Castle Hill, concerns previously denied by the government; and instead Ultimo will focus on design & fashion.

Form, Massing & Scale

The proposed massing and scale is out of context and scale with Harris Street streetscape; in particular, the sensitive interplay between the Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre and the Powerhouse in terms of their visual form and scale.

Each building is also the recipient of major awards. In the case of the Powerhouse, the Sulman Medal for Architectural Merit by the Australian Institute of Architects (NSW) in 1988, and in the case of the Aquatic Centre, an International Architecture Award from the Chicago Athenaeum in 2009 and an award for Public Architecture from the Australian Institute of Architects (NSW) in 2008.

This is not addressed in the proposal.

Instead the proposed massing and scale up, i.e. up to 30.8 metres along Harris Street indicated overleaf fails to provide an appropriate relationship to the street, and spoils the interplay between the two buildings and their relationship to the street. Likewise access from the east will see the public space dominated by high rise towers rather than the heritage fabric along Harris Street.

Moreover, the massing also fails to provide an appropriate relationship to the more intimate scale of Harris Street indicated overleaf; with the shadow diagrams indicating the street will be overshadowed. The proposal also fails to respect or consider the visual impact to the existing views for a number of residential properties which homes have views of Darling Harbour – e.g. a number of apartments at 344 Bulwara Road, Ultimo, where many residents are not aware of the plans.

**Current Massing & Scale – Harris Street Streetscape
(view south towards MAAS outside the Aquatic Centre / MAAS)**



Proposed Massing



V01: NW corner of Harris Street and William Henry Street looking SE



V02: Pier Street northern boulevards looking SW



V03: Docks Line and end of MacArthur Street looking NW



V04: Docks Line between MacArthur Street and Mary Ann Street looking NW



V05: SW corner of Harris Street and MacArthur Street looking NE



V06: Harris Street looking East

Revised (draft) Conservation Management Plan (2022)

The massing and scale for the proposal assumes the (revised) draft Conservation Management Plan which is exhibited as part of this proposal rather than enabling proper consultation in response to the draft prior to this application.

In particular, the grading for the Wran building as 'moderate' is contested. Likewise the Tramsheds while listed on now 'defunct' Register of the National Estate and recognised by National Trust is not listed on the state heritage register. Yet, its relationship is considered as an inherent part of the museum by experts and heritage lovers alike.

Expressions of Interest Design Competition

On the 27 June, Expression of Interest phase was opened in response to the Design Competition, with submissions to 'include a broad task appreciation in response to a Brief, nominate their team, provide a design methodology and share examples of relevant past projects, with the closing date being 29 July. This appears to suggest that the current application process which is intended to inform the design competition is a fait accompli.

Further, given the application is made by the government and will be assessed by another government department, the process appears flawed. Moreover given the long controversy in relation to the plans for the Powerhouse, and that the government required additional time to respond to a Call for Papers by the Upper House, the failure to extend the public exhibition period to enable feedback following the delivery of the Call for Papers similarly appears unsound.

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