

State Significant Development Application

Application No SSD-67588459

Submission Date: 29 May 2024

POWERHOUSE ULTIMO REVITALISATION

OBJECTION

I appreciate the reduced impact on the existing, highly awarded, internationally recognised, Adaptive Reuse buildings of the Powerhouse Museum Buildings of 1988 in the current design.

However

I have the following Items of Serious Concern relating to this SSDA and therefore Object to the current proposal:

1. The NSW Heritage Council unanimously agreed in early May 2024 to list the entire complex and curtilage of the existing Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo on the NSW State Heritage Register.

Therefore

The Heritage Impact Statement by Curio, the Design Report, the Architectural Design and all associated consultant reports should be revised to respond to this change in the brief.

As a result:

The current design should be withdrawn and more time given to all the consultants to review and respond to this significant change to the Brief.

This department and the director of the Powerhouse Museum should acknowledge and respond to a fellow NSW Government department's expertise and direction.

2. The current design proposes to remove mezzanines and therefore access to balconies that allow a range of views of large and significant suspended objects in the Museum's collection. The mezzanines should be preserved in response to the collection and the NSW Heritage Council's direction.
3. As you are already aware:
 - The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo is a Sulman Award winning project, receiving the Sir John Sulman Award in 1988, and is of significant importance to the architectural profession in NSW. The Sulman Award is the highest ranked award by the Australian Institute of Architects (known as the AIA) in NSW.
 - The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo has also received the following awards:
 - The Presidents Award for Recycled Buildings – NSW Public Works Dept with Denton Corker Marshall
 - The Belle Interiors Award for Interior Design
 - The Sir Zelman Cowan Award FinalistAt the time, it was the first project ever to have been nominated in 3 categories in the National Architecture Awards.
 - The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo is an exemplar of adaptive reuse, retaining original industrial fabric, and predates the Tate Modern in London (also an adaptive reuse of a Powerstation). It joins other eminent examples of adaptive reuse such as the Musee d'Orsay in Paris (an adaptive reuse of a railway station, opened in 1986).
 - The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo is an example of the work of NSW Government Architect's Office with Lionel Glendenning as Principal Architect and JW Thomson, Government Architect

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- The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo was the first of many significant buildings on Harris Street to fulfill the Masterplan concept of Harris Street as the technological conduit of Sydney. Its location and scale is also in keeping within the current Master Plan for the Pyrmont Ultimo area.

It not only forms a direct link with the Original Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences building on Harris St, but also generated the scale of buildings that followed: eg the ABC headquarters, the Ultimo Community Centre and the Ian Thorpe Swimming pool.

- The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo of 1988 adaptive reuse including the additions of the Wran Building and Galleria was designed in direct response to the unique and varied collection that it housed. The form and scale of the Wran Building and Galleria responded to the large objects such as significant railway engines and a direct rail link from Central Railway station.
4. The submitted Heritage Impact Statement in this SSDA for the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo is unchanged from the previously submitted Heritage report. This Heritage Impact Statement is incomplete as it only includes 5 buildings on the site from the 2020 SHR curtilage and does not include the 1988 additions or the Harwood Building.
 5. I have gleaned from press and community consultation regarding the Museum's collection, that some? of the engines will be retained at Ultimo and therefore the Wran Building and Galleria must also be retained in their original form. As you know, the rail tracks from Central to the Powerhouse have been preserved under the new Goods Line redevelopment for future posterity and resurrection.
 6. The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo (including the former Ultimo Tramways Powerhouse together with the 1988 adaptive reuse and Additions) is on the AIA (NSW) Register of Significant Buildings – which recognises architectural merit, high architectural qualities, and important works from leading architects and architectural practices. It is also listed as significant by Docomomo Australia and the National Trust of Australia.
 7. The context and history of this place is significant to the history and development of Sydney and NSW. The layers of its development should be easily understood in future development. The current SSDA should be reviewed in light of this recognition by the NSW Heritage Council, AIA, National Trust and Docomomo.
 8. A recognisable presence in Sydney is important for Sydney to be acknowledged as an international player in Architecture, Adaptive Re-Use and Museums of Applied Arts and Applied Sciences.
 9. It is acknowledged that the visual impact of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo has been significantly eroded by recent development at Darling Harbour.

Whilst the reorientation of the entry toward the CBD and Goods Line is welcome, the addition of multiple entries along Harris Street will be difficult to manage and suggests a future and concerning wholesale closure to Harris Street due to this increased security issue. I suggest further review of this aspect be made during design development and a reduction in entries along Harris Street be investigated.

10. Removing sections of buildings and building fabric that are able to be renewed or further adapted to respond to a brief that is not tuned to the collection is a deleterious action with regards environmental sensitivity, waste of resources & embodied energy, and concerning with regards the serious impacts of climate change. Building large volumes without a definite curatorial program is

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irresponsible and has led to much conjecture as to the true function of these spaces. This is especially relevant given the new Castle Hill and Parramatta buildings.

11. There has been much discussion about the exhibition areas in the proposed scheme and no evidence that it has indeed been increased. Please prove what you claim as the plans suggest deletion and removal of internal floor plates, not additional areas.
12. There is no evidence to suggest why the Wran building should be shortened to align with the south face of the Turbine Hall. This proposed revitalisation therefore loses any recognition of the articulation of the original or a visible memory of its glassy exterior facade.
13. Another lost opportunity is the entry sequence from the Harris Street court. The original 1988 Powerhouse Museum entry was focused on the Galleria – a top lit space which drew visitors to the arrival zone and highlighted the large scale exhibits within, whilst providing a detailed appreciation of the building fabric of the heritage, brick buildings.
14. The selection of brick as a new building envelope is curious, given that the Burra Charter suggests a contrast of materials is most appropriate in order to highlight the different eras of a complex of buildings. The Switch House, Turbine Hall and Post Office are brick buildings with the 1988 additional buildings in large format smooth surfaced materials in contrast. Additions of the 21st Century should ideally reflect their era in a unique material palette in order to encourage legibility. This has been completed successfully in recent large scale building projects by the same architects at the NSW Art Gallery and Phoenix Central Park.

In conclusion:

This proposal should be further revised to further ameliorate the detrimental impact to the important, existing, heritage listed 1988 buildings on the site and the renowned Powerhouse Museum Collection.

Yours sincerely