



Save the Powerhouse Campaign
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To
Infrastructure NSW
<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-revitalisation>

CC
The Hon. Chris Minns, NSW Premier
The Hon John Graham, Minister for the Arts
The Hon Penny Sharpe, Minister for Heritage
The Hon Daniel Mookhey, NSW Treasurer
The Hon. Kobi Shetty Balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ultimo, 29 May, 2024

POWERHOUSE ULTIMO REVITALISATION STATE SIGNIFICANT PROJECT APPLICATION SSD-67588459 SUBMISSION TO SSD APPLICATION

“Save the Powerhouse” is a community campaign which aims to keep the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo as a world-renowned Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences as it has been since opening on its current site in 1988.

“Save”’s campaign was founded in early 2015, upon the former Premier, Mike Baird’s announcement that the Powerhouse Museum would be moved to Parramatta and the Ultimo site sold to developers. Our campaign continues to oppose the inadequate sequential “Ultimo Presence” (Berejiklian), “Ultimo Renewal”(Perrottet) or “Ultimo Revitalisation” (Minns) projects created by the same Museum Management/Create NSW/INSW team appointed by the previous NSW Government.

“Save” organises information meetings and events as necessary and communicates with its base through bulk emailing (300+ addresses) and a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/savethepowerhouse> (5,200+ followers).

“Save the Powerhouse” **STRONGLY OBJECTS** to the “Revitalisation” as described on the NSW Government Planning Portal <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-revitalisation>, and **urges the NSW Government to immediately reverse its unjustified decision to close the Museum, to carry out the necessary repair and maintenance (a direct consequence of a decade of neglect by successive managements and trustee boards), to renew the exhibitions and re-open the Museum as soon as possible.**

-1- FUNDAMENTAL DOCUMENTS DO NOT EXIST OR ARE KEPT SECRET

The SSD Development Application was launched without the following fundamental documents -

- Business Case
- Architect Design Brief
- Future Exhibition Programming

Either those documents do not exist or they exist but are kept secret by the NSW Government –

- If they do not exist (which we seriously doubt) –
 - How could the NSW Government have decided on the merit of the development without a benefit/cost ratio and
 - How could the Architect have designed a “Revitalisation” without knowing the future use of the building.
- If they exist but are kept secret –
 - This is a clear broken promise by the Minister for the Arts who declared (March 22, 2023) “*The NSW Parliament Select Committee on the management of the Powerhouse Museum has revealed the shroud of secrecy that the NSW Government has sought to apply across the operations of The Powerhouse Museum for the past 12 years...A NSW Labor government will release key details of the plans for Ultimo and Parramatta.*”
 - The current consultation is flawed as the public is unable to assess the merits of the project without knowing these “key details.”

-2- THE PROJECT IS OVERWHELMINGLY UNPOPULAR

- It has been opposed in the vast majority of submissions responding to the various public consultations conducted so far.
- Our joint Save the Powerhouse/Pymont Action/Friends of Ultimo’s petition <https://www.change.org/p/keep-the-powerhouse-museum-in-ultimo-open> has received almost **7,000 signatures** so far, from NSW, interstate and overseas and is still growing.
- 258 comments <http://tiny.cc/k209yz> were received on the petition page, all very critical of the project and the NSW Government’s betrayal (eg “*We do not like to be lied to*” or “*Governments that break promises, that operate in secret and tell lies, end up losing elections*”).

-3- THE MUSEUM WOULD BE CLOSED FOR A VERY LONG TIME

- The Arts Minister promised that “*The Powerhouse Museum Ultimo will close its doors on February 5, 2024 for building and conservation works that are expected to take up to three years.*” (i.e. re-opening in early 2017).
There is no mention of this deadline anywhere in the EIS documents.
- The project will (officially) cost \$250M to the taxpayer but only \$119M (less than half of the total) is provided in the 2023-24 Budget over the next 3 years, the remaining sum (\$131M) being spread over the next 10 years.
- The 3-year planning is unrealistic. The first year (2023) is spent in SSD process and procurement and the last year will be required to fit out the Museum and establish the new (unknown) exhibitions, leaving only a year for large construction works including excavation (loading dock duplicate) and large scale demolitions.

Based on professional experience, we realistically believe that works per se will take at least 3 years, hence a minimum Museum closure of at least 5 years (earliest possible re-opening in 2029), notwithstanding the budgetary problems above.

-4- THE PROJECT IS IN BREACH OF SEVERAL REGULATIONS

- The Museum's own **Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Act 1945** <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1945-031> which reads (Art14- Objects and functions of trustees): **"The trustees shall have the following objects...the maintenance and administration of the Museum in such manner as will effectively minister to the needs and demands of the community in any or all branches of applied science and art and the development of industry..."** **No mention is made of vast empty spaces suitable for parties and venue hire.**

- The **Burra Charter** <https://australia.icomos.org/publications/burra-charter-practice-notes/> which defines the steps in planning for and managing a **place of cultural significance** as "Understand the place" → "Assess cultural significance" → "Identify all factors and issues" → "Develop policy" → "Prepare a management plan" → "Implement the management plan" → "Monitor the results and modify the plan".
None of these steps was taken.

- The recent decision of the **NSW Heritage Council** (May 8, 2024 <http://tiny.cc/3a09yz>) to *"recommend to the Minister (for Heritage) that (she) directs the curtilage extension...of the **Powerhouse Museum Complex**...on the State Heritage Register..."*

The Council's decision recognises the heritage value of the whole site as being *"the first large state-owned electricity generating station in NSW" but also because "the conversion to a museum has potential State historic and technical significance for its role in the wider heritage conservation movement as a lauded, highly influential early example of adaptive reuse of industrial heritage, nationally and internationally."*

The Harwood Building "decoupling" and the Wran Building and Galleria mutilation and gutting are clearly non-compliant with this decision.

-5- EXPERT ADVICE HAS SYSTEMATICALLY BEEN IGNORED

- Lionel Glendening, Architect of the adaptation of the Ultimo Power Station into a world-class museum, project for which he was awarded a Sulman Prize, and Dr Lindsay Sharp, who led the project during its design and development and became the Museum's Founding Director were never consulted.

- Alan Croker, the author of the acclaimed Opera House Conservation Management Plan (CMP), was originally contracted to design the Powerhouse Museum CMP but his contract was terminated before the Plan was completed.

His Heritage and Conservation practice, Design 5, produced the White Bay Power Station's conservation plan. The project recently won the highest honour, the Judges' Choice, at the 30th annual National Trust (NSW) Heritage Awards and "was hailed as a once-in-a-lifetime conservation project of exceptional historic, technical and social significance." <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/this-behemoth-was-at-risk-death-by-neglect-and-bird-poo-now-it-s-won-a-top-prize-20240516-p5jebo.html>

-6- THE EIS IS OFTEN INCOMPLETE, INACCURATE AND/OR MISLEADING

- The plans and reports in the EIS are frequently inconsistent and contradictory.
- There are no actual architectural plans in the EIS. There are only architectural drawings, each one marked "**DO NOT SCALE OF DRAWINGS**".
- It contains a number of misleading statements such as: "The project is contributing to this increase in cultural floor space" when it massively reduces it (see below)
- A table comparing the existing and proposed exhibition areas fails to list all the intermediate floor exhibition spaces earmarked for demolition in the "existing" column but lists a theatre as an exhibition space in the "proposed" column.

-7- THE PROJECT WOULD REDUCE THE MUSEUM EXHIBITION SPACE BY 76%

- The Powerhouse Museum opened in 1988 **with 25 exhibitions across 20,000 m² of exhibition space over five levels and five buildings.**

Revitalisation works in 2011-12, created a new 1,800m² temporary exhibition space for international blockbusters in the Wran building, moving the museum's entry to the Galleria. In the same revitlisation, the level 4 Switch House decorative arts exhibition space of 720 m² was converted to a café and shop. This created an overall addition of 1,080 m² exhibition space, giving the PHM **a current total 21,080 m² of exhibition space across five levels.**

- The Design Factsheet

<https://cdn.sanity.io/files/wkgts1b4/production/f3d740600c4a4d9ef6f73791b12b877d8a3c0ea2.pdf> (see Powerhouse website) lists the proposed exhibition spaces as follows -

GF	Space 1	1,900m ²
	Space 2	2,000m ²
	Space 3	900m ²
L2	Space 4	1,200m ²

		6,000m ²
But Space 3 is not an exhibition space but a theatre		-900m ²

		5,100m² (-76%)

The total exhibition space will be LESS THAN A QUARTER of that existing, a public asset's destruction unprecedented in the civilised world.

This is primarily the result of the systematic demolition of all intermediate levels, galleries and balconies.

- The Museum is reduced to 3 large exhibition spaces more **suited to parties and venue hire** than to display the Museum's **diverse collections**, showing that either the authors of the project deeply misunderstand these collections and/or suggesting a hidden agenda.



Large empty spaces



Is this the Museum's future?

-8- THE PROJECT WOULD DESTROY THE WRAN LEGACY

In contradiction with the Arts Minister's promise (March 22, 2023) to preserve the Wran legacy (*"Only Labor will save The Powerhouse Museum...It was the Wran Labor Government who conceived of a purpose-built institution on the site of the old Ultimo power station"*) the proposed "Revitalisation" would destroy it.

The southernmost 13m of the Wran Building and Galleria would be destroyed, the Wran Building gutted, the Boulton & Watt engine, the Museum's "jewel", isolated and the whole 1988 extension hidden behind a brick wall, **an insult to the Wran legacy**.

-9- THE PROJECT IS A WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY

Almost **AUD half a billion of public money** (when the cost of exhibition spaces fitting, collection transport to and from Castle Hill and other associated costs are added to the official \$297M budget) will be wasted on **a project universally rejected** and NSW will have lost a world-class museum .

It is doubtful whether a **GENUINE business case with an acceptable benefit/cost ratio** could had been produced for the **destruction of a heritage-listed public asset** after only 36 years of existence when the Museum was constructed with a life span of 100 years or more. **This also represents a colossal environmental disaster.**

In addition –

- As a result of the “decoupling” of the Harwood Building a new loading dock with a truck turntable will be carved at great expenses in the sandstone bedrock under the existing forecourt, doubling up with the existing one a few meters away in the Harwood Building

Note that the pretext that the existing loading dock is difficult to operate as its entrance is located in Macarthur Street which is heavily used by pedestrians is invalid. The entrance of the new dock will also be in Macarthur Street!

- The “Revitalised” Museum will include -
 - School students’ accommodation facilities (**an absurd waste of public money**) when they currently board at the YMCA, a 5mn walk away.
 - Creative enterprise studios will be built along Harris Street blocking the view and the light into the Wran Building (see above)

Both additions do not form part of the Museum’s attributions (refer to Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Act 1945 above).

-10- SUCCESSIVE REASONS GIVEN FOR COUNTINUING THE PROJECT ARE NOT CREDIBLE

- The creation of vast empty spaces is necessary to host international visiting exhibitions
 - Many exhibitions of this type were held in the existing Museum (see <http://tiny.cc/ios9yz>)
 - The recent, very successful, “Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs” exhibition at the Australia Museum was arranged in a number of medium size spaces located on 2 different levels.

- The Museum entrance must be moved to the eastern façade: An entrance on the eastern façade was opened in the early 2010s when the Goodline was created. It worked until the Covid pandemic closure of the Museum in 2020.

The current Management chose not to re-open it in 2022 in order to facilitate the removal of the Transport exhibition in the Boiler House to create an empty space for late night parties?

- The “Revitalisation” will improve the view on the Old Power Station facades from the Goodline: The same result can be obtained by simply removing the disused “Powerhouse Café” shed. This will cost only a tiny fraction of the “Revitalisation” budget.



To obtain this viewjust remove the Powerhouse café shed!

In any case the Scape Darling House and Darling Square ugly buildings, a result of the Darling Square development in the 2010s, spoiled that view forever.

- The roof leaks: this could (and should have been) fixed years ago as part of routine maintenance
- There are damp patches on the external walls: they are often the consequence of windows seals which should have been replaced as part of routine maintenance.
- There are cracks in the structure: The only photo leaked to the press was that of a crack on a stack in the Boiler House. This crack appeared when the boiler was first fired in 1902 and was kept by the Architect of the “adaptive conversion” as a record of the building’s industrial past.
- The air-conditioning system is out of date: It was a state-of-the-art installation at the time of the Museum opening and may need modernisation, but this could not justify the demolition of 16,000m2 of exhibition floors and could have been done without closing the Museum.

CONCLUSION

The proposed “Heritage Revitalisation” as exhibited must be **REJECTED** -

- It is a massive waste of taxpayers’ money opposed by large sections of the public.
- It proposes to **destroy the heritage of the Wran era**, obliterate Ultimo’s rich industrial history and erases a beloved world-class Museum.

“**Do Nothing**” is the only reasonable option –

- **Immediately cancel the project**
- Proceed with the necessary repairs and maintenance neglected by successive Managements and Trusts.
- Update the exhibitions and -
- **RE-OPEN THE MUSEUM AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.**

Patricia JOHNSON & Jean-Pierre ALEXANDRE
Co-Convenors

Save the Powerhouse

