

POWERHOUSE ULTIMO REVITALISATION  
SUB-71430468  
SUBMISSION

I write to OBJECT TO THE PROJECT POWERHOUSE ULTIMO REVITALISATION SUB-71430468 STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT, MUSEUM, GARDENS AND ZOOS IN THE CITY OF SYDNEY, currently on exhibition <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-revitalisation>

I request that my OBJECTION to the project presented in Application SSD-67588459.

COMMENT AND JUSTIFICATION

Our Powerhouse Museum (PHM), opened in Ultimo in 1988 and has been a world-class leading institution showcasing Science and Technology Museum in Australia.

Having participated in almost every consultation opportunity, publicly held meetings, community meetings, and the NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry into NSW museums and galleries - I am concerned that the NSW Government has not valued the countless number of requests, complaints, submissions and protests of the many qualified museum experts, architects, designers, public officials and Australian citizens - that have put objections to the NSW Government about proposed significant changes in the form and function of this museum.

The historical shifts in proposed plans following the original decision to close and move the PHM until now, has been arduous for the community in terms of their genuine engagement and consistent objections to all the proposed changes.

This has been an epic waste of time and public money. In the most recent public forums, I asked if there would be a final costing of every measure that the NSW Government has undertaken until now - and the answer was "no".

From the initial decision by the NSW Government to take away the PHM from Ultimo until now - has occurred without a public mandate or even a published purpose. I find this unsatisfactory, to say the least.

Forgetting all that has happened before, the design for this building is not matched to a museum focus or design brief. The museum that the public know and love was PURPOSE DESIGNED AND BUILT.

What seems to have happened, when taking the construction in Parramatta into account is that decision have been made - behind the scenes to keep our precious and irreplaceable historic artefacts in storage at the Castle Hill shed to then be distributed to Parramatta, Ultimo and beyond on various occasions. This is not what commonly occurs with

museums. Artefacts moved between locations are at high risk of permanent damage or loss.

According to Museum Expert Kylie Winkworth “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”.

This also diminishes the value of the original and only PHM by turning it into a brand and using the historic building as a venue.

No mention or value has been made about the linked story of the PHM and the Harwood Building.

At the most recent series of public consultation sessions the question was raised about why the Harwood building is not linked to this “Revitalisation” program. No answer was supplied but it was stated that the NSW Government had no plans to change its use.

It seems obvious that the Harwood Building’s purpose is being replicated at Castle Hill and without the PHM collection being kept in Ultimo that the NSW Government will announce the sale of this building and site.

It is not possible to believe that the NSW Government will keep their promise of saving the Harwood Building when they have not saved the PHM as promised in the last election campaign.

It is also not possible to believe the NSW Government because there were promises to rebuild Willow Grove but they haven’t. And I doubt that anyone in the NSW Government knows where the Willow Grove building materials are being stored, if they are. Further, I would be very surprised if the NSW Government would put money towards rebuilding this once majestic historic building.

Ultimately, I have lost faith in what this NSW Government says that they will do.

It is my observation that the NSW State Government has undertaken a series of “chess-like” game moves leading to legislated and documented changes prior to Application SSD-32927319 and its required process of consultation.

Changes to Land Titles for our PHM site, property purchases and construction in Parramatta and Castle Hill - all provide for and facilitate a seemingly “smooth transition” to change our beloved PHM into a “State Significant Development”.

The NSW Government in this way, shows that it has held intentions to develop the PHM site and it's associated Harwood Building for commercial purposes.

In the recent consultation process it has been stated that the NSW Government wishes to seize the night time economy that exists in the nearby Darling Harbour area. For this to occur, the museum could remain open in its current form but it is clear that in the form of a few open spaces, the PHM would become an events centre - lightly decorated with priceless artefacts.

I refer to the evidence of previous submissions, protests, and continued community responses to the changes imposed on the Powerhouse Museum since 2015, that show that there is significant State and wider community opinion and desire for this facility to continue as the museum that the public knows.

Submissions of fact and opinion presented by experts in the museums and architectural fields have supplied this NSW State Government with context, factual details and expert opinion\_beyond that which is required to demonstrate that this Public Asset is a world-leading Applied Arts and Sciences Museum in both function and form.

The State Significant Development Application SUB-71430468 and now, SUB-71430468 and its process of consultation have failed to satisfy me as to why the NSW Government has proposed such significant changes to our PHM as it stands under its current charter.

I OBJECT to changes to the main form and function our Powerhouse Museum envelope and charter.

There have been many public meetings following former Premier Mike Baird's announcement that our Powerhouse Museum would be moved to Parramatta.

Public community action groups from Ultimo and Parramatta - the Powerhouse Museum Alliance (PMA) the North Parramatta Action Group (NPRAG) and Friends of Ultimo, have held regular meetings and rallies addressed by Federal, State and Local Government representatives; museums 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. And each public community action group has provided submissions and testified twice at the Upper House Inquiry into Museums and Galleries.

The NSW Government must acknowledge that there is significant opposition and objections by the general public and expert community, to changing our Powerhouse Museum in any shape or form that might devalue it's charter, position and standing on a local, State, National and World stage.

The project would downgrade the Powerhouse Museum, not revitalise it.

According to NSW official SSD Application documents <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-revitalisation> the proposed project would reduce the GFA to 15,843m<sup>2</sup> (-63%) and the number of exhibition spaces to only 4 for a total of 6,000m<sup>2</sup> (-72%).

What's more, the proposed Space 3 is not an exhibition space but more theatre-like, reducing the number of exhibition spaces to 3 for a total of 5,100m<sup>2</sup> (less than a quarter of the original area).

This downsizing is mostly due to the proposed destruction of all the mezzanines over 5 levels, the removal of the original Engine House floor and the demolition of the southern part of the Wran building and Galleria.

The mixture of existing spaces from 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 and so a mix of spaces of different sizes is more appraise.

I agree with Kylie Winkworth, former Powerhouse Museum Trustee, who has stated that the disappearance of 22 flexible exhibition spaces of various size "purpose designed for decorative and applied arts, Indigenous design, social history, migration heritage, space, science, interactives and exhibitions for kids and families" is particularly alarming.

I agree with Arts Critic John McDonald who has said, "Large, cavernous spaces may be suitable for rave parties, but not for exhibitions...Put paintings in a giant-sized space and they become postage stamps, lighting becomes difficult and expensive, while all sense of intimate engagement with an object is lost... In addition, exhibitions like "1,001 Remarkable Objects" cost more as they need expensive temporary partitions to be erected."

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 this project's scope.

Further, I agree with Kylie Winkworth has also stated that the "project is wasteful, destructive and devoid of any credible museum rationale or cultural purpose. Instead of the government's promised heritage revitalisation, NSW taxpayers will be slugged \$250 million for a museum demolition project that destroys the heritage, facilities, functionality, collection access and exhibition spaces of the Powerhouse Museum – the museum the government promised to save. The project erases all traces of the 1988 Sulman award-winning museum and its heritage adaptation and landmark design. No heritage value is ascribed to any part of the actual Powerhouse Museum which will be gutted and stripped to the bare brick walls...Only three large objects will be left stranded in the former museum which will be cleansed of its collections and its industrial, power and transport exhibitions."

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.

The Powerhouse Museum opened in 1988 and was designed for a working life of more than 100 years. Gutting it after just 35 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 and to gut it in this way is an international embarrassment.

The project is wasteful, destructive and unnecessary and should be rejected.

The NSW Government and Public Service of the day must recognise that they are merely the temporary caretakers of state public assets. They have no mandate to alter and degrade a national treasure.

In summary, I object to this project.

I urge the NSW Government to invest in the restoration of the Powerhouse and to modernise its exhibition spaces using up-to-date technologies.

Respectfully

Kiri Valsamis  
Jones Street  
Pyrmont