

5 October 2024

Infrastructure NSW

Attention: Annika Hather

**Re- PHM SSD\_67588459 2024 - Powerhouse Ultimo "Revitalization" – Revision F**

Docomomo Australia submits that the revised scheme of the Powerhouse Museum Project, Ultimo, as represented in Revision F drawings, continues to constitute a major demolition of the museum infrastructure that was opened in 1988 and is not an appropriate treatment of the SHR-listed former power station or the now-SHR-listed 1988 Wran Wing & Galleria.

Given that the entire site is now listed as an item of environmental heritage of State significance, the proposal, as represented in the Revision F architectural drawings, is not an appropriate approach to maintaining the heritage significance of the site, both as a building complex of architectural significance, and also as an educational and cultural institution of national significance.

In the proposed Revision F scheme, the majority of the 1988 museum physical structure and infrastructure will still be removed. Some of the major features are:

- The south end of the Wran Wing and Galleria will be permanently demolished and removed,
- The mezzanine floors and all the current infrastructure in all the buildings will be demolished,
- Level 2 of the Wran Wing and Galleria will be largely demolished and then supported by a complicated and expensive 'sky hook' system of supporting structures above demolished areas, as indicated in the revised Architectural & Urban Design Report,
- The Harris Street forecourt and colonnade will be demolished,
- The lightweight cladding of the end walls of the Wran Wing and Galleria will be removed and replaced with brick, representing an unsympathetic change to the original design and character of the building.

Docomomo Australia questions the stated rationale behind these major changes:

- The south end of the Wran Wing and the Galleria are intended to be cut back to reveal more of the west elevation of the brick Turbine Hall. However, the proposed new wing along Harris Street will obscure the view of the Turbine Hall from Harris Street.
- The removal of all the internal mezzanines within the Wran Wing, Galleria, and the original power house brick buildings significantly reduces the area of exhibition space and creates large volumes that are not as suitable as the existing small spaces on the mezzanines that are able to exhibit artefacts of technology. How are the large volumes to be used for displaying smaller artefacts or are the large volumes being created to create event spaces rather than display spaces? There appears to be no provision in the "revitalized" complex for a lecture theatre which is an essential component in the public education functions of the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences. Retention of the lecture theatre and lower areas would obviate the need for the complicated and expensive 'sky hook' system of supporting buildings over lower demolished floors.
- The revised Architectural & Urban Design Report states that the removal of the lightweight cladding and glazing in the north and south ends of the barrel-vaulted Wran Wing and Galleria and replacing it with brick is to create a unified "campus." This totally ignores the origins of the 1988 buildings' design as a reference to the great 19th century light-filled exhibition halls with lightweight walls and roofs. Cutting out the light in the Galleria is contrary to the original design intent of a light-filled circulation space displaying the important Boulton & Watt steam engine and the No.1 locomotive. The lightweight cladding of the Wran Wing performs its function of excluding light for the exhibition space and its original, bright external colours announced the functions of the institution in a playful manner that contrasted with the solemnity of the brick power house buildings. The proposed redesign destroys the original award-winning architecture.

The extent and unsympathetic nature of the proposed works will not retain the significance of the buildings. The Revision F proposal continues to ignore the architectural qualities and design of the existing buildings and, indeed, actively destroys the 1988 architectural approach. The insistence on bricking-in the lightweight buildings is particularly egregious.

Docomomo Australia continues to submit that the current “revitalization” project should not proceed in its current form. Docomomo has significant reservations about the ability of the current Conservation Management Plan to guide future evolution of the site. In particular the assessment of aesthetic significance fails to identify the place’s architectural qualities.

The lack of correct assessment and understanding of the complex’s significance in the original CMP has led to an incorrect and inadequate outcome in the design competition. The competition brief did not, in our opinion, reflect the significance of the Wran Wing and Galleria and this has resulted in an outcome that will destroy the architecture of the Wran Wing and Galleria and appears to undermine the very function of the museum as a museum of applied arts and sciences.

In addition, Docomomo Australia remains concerned that, despite the recognition of the entire complex’s significance by its listing on the NSW SHR, the site-specific exemptions attached to the listing do not adequately protect its significant values.

Yours faithfully

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Professor Hannah Lewi  
Vice-Chair DoCoMoMo Australia