

SUBMISSION – by email to Candice Pon

PROPOSED EXPANSION OF THE MUSEUM'S DISCOVERY CENTRE FOR STORAGE CASTLE HILL

March 2021

We have been engaged in this issue for about a decade, in seeking the conservation and evolution of the PHM in Ultimo. We also support museums elsewhere including Parramatta that are relevant to their histories. We have withdrawn a gift to the PHM covered in a Sun Herald story on June 21 2020 as it was no longer a suitable repository for the work, not likely to get exhibited. We are yet to place it.

This proposal is for remote warehousing of the collection with the evident hidden agenda of redevelopment or sale of the Harwood Building which currently serves essential servicing and storage functions to the operation of the Museum. The cost, inefficiencies and risks of this disconnection need evaluation. Has this been done? This project appears to be spending \$100m to replace the Harwood in a remote location involving huge numbers of trips. Has the costing of this and the conservation issues been considered? Why is public money being squandered to leverage another inner city site to developers? This will, of course destroy or compromise a building of State Significance. The current use ancillary to the Museum is appropriate. What alternate uses could be better? The tramshed is also State Significant heritage appropriately used given its history, and available to the public.

In support we quote some key points from Kylie Winkworth's Submission:

'The MDC is not a museum. It is a set of collection stores. It is not generally accessible and does not present curated exhibitions. The project represents a substantial downgrading of the collection facilities in the Harwood building, co-located with the library, archives, conservation, large object workshop and exhibition fabrication. Unlike the Powerhouse Museum's site at Ultimo, Castle Hill is not easily accessible by public transport, and has little parking for staff and service vehicles.'

We estimate the true cost of the new store to be \$100m+ if staff costs are included. A fraction of this money would upgrade the Harwood building's collection facilities with a new lift etc.

The money spent on this development could build three new regional museums, or a major new museum in south western Sydney which would have far higher public benefits than warehousing all the collections at Castle Hill. The application does not demonstrate that alternative proposals were considered.

The project is contrary to the undertakings that the government made to keep the Powerhouse in Ultimo on July 4. It was set in train in 2019 and there has been no deviation. Nearly 100 people are working on photographing and packing the collection.

If the development is approved the large transport and power collections will be relocated to Castle Hill which will allow the PHM to be emptied of most of its defining

collections so the museum can be used for other purposes, or given a new remit, or later sold off when and if the 'museum' is established at Parramatta'.

The historical and scientific significance of the Castle Hill Experimental Plantation is another facet of this site, not evaluated by this proposal, examined by Chris Betteridge and others.

Quoting Betteridge:

'The end of an era In a chapter of the book Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and its precursors 1880-2005, titled 'Empowering: Applied research and the commercial museum 1880-1978' by Roy Macleod and Kimberley Webber, the authors argue that it was surprising that the museum's research team survived a succession of inquiries in the 1960s and '70s, given that there had been 'few significant industrial outcomes' and that the team was 'housed in an old-fashioned building at the wrong end of town, with outdated laboratories and ageing staff'.⁵⁸ This state of affairs was perceived by the authors to have 'little sense of the dynamic between museum and industry' that the early curators and their supporters had envisaged.⁵⁹ This begs the question: What would have been the good end of town for a scientific research facility? This author argues that a site adjacent to Sydney Technical College and within easy walking distance of Sydney University made a lot of sense. The argument that few significant technical outcomes had been achieved by the museum's scientists after the 1920s is also questioned. The authors who made that assertion were historians and it is not known how extensively they consulted with the museum's former scientific staff or with the essential oil industry on the museum's phytochemical achievements in the post - 1920s

Ref: 'The history of phytochemical research at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and the significance of the museum's Castle Hill Experimental Plantation'.

The PHM is not a showcase, it is one of the country's key cultural assets even though it has been rundown and under-financed for a long time, hampering its evolution. The city has grown vastly in this time; its cultural infrastructure has not. The re-vamp of the Australian Museum should inspire likewise with the PHM. Notwithstanding the neglect, visitation to the PHM continues to rise.

The State Government should honour its commitment to conservation of the PHM in Ultimo including its support facilities in the Harwood Building before further investment in the far less used facility at Castle Hill. The Harwood Building is integral to the function of the PHM apart from its State Significance. The significance of the Castle Hill Experimental Plantation also needs a proper evaluation.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce & Sarah Lay