

25 June, 2020

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Mr Marcus Jennejohn,
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment,
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Dear Mr Jennejohn,

SSD-10416 – Parramatta Powerhouse Museum

I have made submissions to both Legislative Council Inquiries and attended public hearings at which evidence has been presented that lead me to strongly oppose the proposed development of the “Powerhouse” Museum on the site selected in Parramatta for the following reasons:

- What is proposed is not a museum. It is a glorified function centre. There will be no permanent collections on display, no dedicated spaces for museum exhibitions and no on-site storage for the huge collections which have been acquired, often by donation, to the current Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo. The total public presentation space has been reduced from the initially specified 18,000m² to 12,000m². At the Powerhouse in Ultimo, exhibition space is 21,400m². There has been a massive increase in commercial space in the proposed new facility, and even exhibition space will be hired out for events and performances.
- In addition to the proposed commercial event spaces, the proposed facility will include a research laboratory, apartments for visiting researchers, a rooftop terrace and a student dormitory. This is not a museum for the benefit of the people of NSW, but a commercial/residential venture for the benefit of the corporate sector. We have seen a similar transformation take place at Darling Harbour which was set aside as a place for the people of Sydney, but has now been sold off to the private sector.
- The site is prone to dramatic flooding, as seen recently during an extreme weather event. This means that the very large items now on display in Ultimo eg the Boulton & Watts steam engine, Locomotive 1, the model of the Strasbourg clock, and various early aeroplanes will have to be dismantled, avoiding damage to old and fragile exhibits, then by methods not identified as yet, raised to upper levels of the proposed building to avoid the flood prone lower areas. In the event that these items are dismantled unscathed, it is probable that they will never see the light of day again, and be stored off-site, possibly at the Castle Hill facility. These exhibits, on permanent exhibition in Ultimo, have context in the former Ultimo Power Station building, and adjoining the tram sheds which housed the first tramline in Sydney.
- The construction of the proposed facility (one can't call it a museum) will require the demolition of Parramatta heritage sites Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace. This will set a precedent for similar desecration of our heritage elsewhere in Sydney/NSW, if the Government takes it into its collective head to plough ahead with other unjustified projects.
- The cost of this project is completely unjustified. From an initial project budget of \$200M in 2015, costs have escalation to a staggering \$1.4 - \$1.8 billion. And currently unbudgeted

associated costs, including provision of more space at the Castle Hill facility to accommodate the Ultimo collection, are currently unfunded. It is unlikely that the sale of the Ultimo Powerhouse site will generate anything like the budgeted amount (which will probably become even higher as the project proceeds, as has happened on so many NSW Government infrastructure projects). The cost/benefit analysis just doesn't stack up.

- There are, of course, alternative courses of action to achieve lasting public benefit. These include retention of the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo, continuing to house and display the precious and unique large items which cannot be relocated safely in the proposed new facility in Parramatta. The Ultimo Museum sits in the heart of the Government's Innovation Corridor, surrounded by UTS, the ABC, SIT and the many large and small innovative companies delivering new technological solutions to the many industrial and social problems facing people today. It is easily accessed by public transport and is on a site that is contextually appropriate to display historical and futuristic technological achievements, both Australian and international.
- And Parramatta, does deserve a museum which displays historic technological achievements associated with the Western Sydney region. These include early agricultural innovation, celebration of the beginnings of the wool industry which so enriched the early colony. And a museum in Parramatta could also celebrate the success of Australia's multi-cultural evolution, as well as the technological achievements of First Nations people, and tell their stories which go back around 60,000 years.
- Where could such an institution be located? There are any number of historical buildings not restored or fully utilised in Parramatta which could be adapted as a museum. A museum could also be constructed in association with the long-awaited replacement Parramatta swimming pool.

To summarise. I totally oppose this proposal on the grounds of:

- Inappropriate site
- Inappropriate usage
- Huge cost
- Lack of public benefit
- Destruction of heritage
- Opportunity cost ie the destruction of the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum and loss of its exhibits from their appropriate context of the Innovation Corridor in the Pyrmont/Ultime peninsula

There are many other ways to provide a new cultural facility to serve and celebrate the achievements of the people of Western Sydney, probably at a fraction of the cost of this proposal. Destruction of the Powerhouse and removal of its fragile exhibits benefits no-one, except perhaps the lucky few in the corporate sector.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Elenius (BA Earth Sciences Macq Uni, majoring in Land Management, 1979)

