

I object to the Powerhouse Parramatta project - and cannot support the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the State Significant Development Application for the development of the Powerhouse Parramatta at 34-54 & 30B Phillip Street and 338 Church Street, Parramatta.

I detail below my numerous reasons opposing the Powerhouse Parramatta project.

### **Illogical waste of taxpayer money**

Infrastructure NSW has estimated that \$1.1-\$1.5 billion will be needed to fund the cost of the 'relocation' of the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. This is a ridiculous waste of taxpayer money.

- If Gladys Berejiklian can axe the \$810 million refurbishment of the ANZ Stadium in order to supposedly better spend the money restarting the economy and / or plug the NSW budget due to covid-19, she should also halt the ridiculous move of the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta.
- The government has to stop wasting money on things that are not required or affordable - and not only in times of a pandemic.  
There are so many far more critical areas in need of government funding.
- Arts and culture are some of the biggest sectors being hurt and hit during the coronavirus pandemic - and just look at what has happened at Carriageworks - going into voluntary administration.  
So what further havoc will this proposed move do to the arts and culture sector?
- The state government should stop the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta - saving \$1.1-\$1.5 billion that can be allocated to more deserving and needy projects.

On what basis does Infrastructure NSW assert that this new state cultural institution will attract visitors to NSW from interstate and internationally, and generate economic benefits for local business through visitor spend on food and accommodation among other items?

- I'm sure data - and anecdotal evidence - suggests most tourists visit the harbour foreshores and Sydney Harbour Bridge, Taronga Zoo, Manly and Bondi, Darling Harbour, the Opera House and the Rocks - not Parramatta.
- In February I caught a ferry back from Abbotsford to Parramatta on a weekday - and spoke with 2 elderly British tourists who had boarded at Circular Quay. They couldn't get over how long the Rivercat ferry ride took from the City to Parramatta - and that there were no refreshments available. Much of their day was being spent on the ferry - and I really felt they would have been better taking a harbour ferry cruise - and I felt quite sorry for them regarding the choice they had made - as they were only in Sydney for 3 days. Tourists such as these, particularly with limited time, generally will not travel to Parramatta - to a museum - and it's nonsense, without evidence, for Infrastructure NSW to assert they would - which undermines their argument for the proposed move of the Powerhouse Museum.

I cannot believe the EIS states - on p. 116 - that there could be 2 million visitors per year to the proposed site in Parramatta. This represents about 6000 visitors per day! This has to be a serious miscalculation surely - and shouldn't be used to justify over a billion dollars of unnecessary expense.

- How have they forecast their 2 million visitors?

In 2018, the value of the Ultimo site was revalued at \$220 million, up from the previous valuation of \$131 million in 2015.

- So one really has to question the logic of this proposed move - as it's unlikely the sale of the site can now generate a profit for the government, now the cost of the proposed move has apparently blown out to over \$1 billion dollars.

- Why is the NSW government seemingly planning to sell off assets whilst simultaneously removing an existing purpose-built cultural investment?
- And if the government isn't selling off the land, why is it closing the Powerhouse in Ultimo?
- Everyone seems to be asking what 'business interests' or 'property developers' are behind this plan?
- What is the merit in this proposed move and sale - because surely it means developers will get their hands on this site at Ultimo - on more inner city real estate - but what money will go into state coffers?
- The government's refusal to explain its rationale and its enthusiasm to waste money surely suggests deals have been done in secret?
- But if no decision has been made regarding what to do with the Ultimo site, that is an even worst case scenario - and certainly doesn't reflect responsible management of the assets of NSW.

Will most of the Ultimo exhibition be sold off to help pay for the government's illogical proposed move of the Powerhouse Museum?

### **New site is in a flood zone**

The Parramatta River easily floods in the planned location for the museum - and hence it's a no-brainer that a quality museum with a priceless collection should not be located here, on the banks of the Parramatta River.

- The site is designated as a flood-prone site - with a 2016 flood study finding much of the site falls within one-in-20 and one-in-100-year flood levels - and is also subject to localised flooding.
- And I've seen the river flooded numerous times in this location - with pedestrians unable to walk along the riverbank - and the ferry service from Sydney halted. It happens often when there is heavy rain.

### **Ultimo site continues to be the 'perfect fit' for the existing Powerhouse Museum**

The current site in Ultimo is a perfect fit - the building is a landmark and attraction in itself - in the hub of where past industrial activity took place.

- The building is part of the fabric, it's whole point and purpose - located in the old tramway powerhouse - and includes the 20 metre high boiler and turbine halls - able to house steam engines, locomotives, planes, trains, trams, horse-drawn buses etc etc.
- The existing museum, in its current location at Ultimo, has an important historical connection with the Ultimo and Pyrmont area.
- The Powerhouse Ultimo is in Sydney's original industrial heartland - and is large enough to properly show off exhibits - a reminder of our past - and our present - through its dedicated collection of Australia's material heritage and stories of Australian culture, history and lifestyle.
- And a walk from Central Station down the pedestrianised Goods Line over the old rail bridge completes the perfect effect.  
I'm so glad I did that last year - not realising at the time I was making perhaps a very unique and important visit - if the Premier goes ahead with her plans to demolish the existing site.
- The Ultimo Powerhouse is such a socially significant place, a fine example of built heritage in its own right - yet simultaneously containing an extraordinary collection that tells the story of innovation, technological development, progress and advancement in Sydney and in Australia.

It's devastating to hear that the Catalina flying boat – the largest and heaviest plane to be hung in any museum in the world, the 1785 Boulton & Watt steam engine, the No 1 Locomotive - the first

train to run in NSW - around 30 significant and valuable objects - will be removed from the safe and secure display in Ultimo and put into some unknown place of storage.

This is a completely unacceptable action proposed by this government - supposedly custodians of property of the State with the collection supposedly held in trust for the people of NSW.

The cost of reproducing a building to house a train – or a plane – are prohibitive. The building is as important as the collection to the history and evolution of Sydney.

- And any closure of the Powerhouse at Ultimo - if it has to happen - certainly should not occur until the alternative has been built.
- Sydney should not be 4-5 years without any form of the museum.

### **Unsuitability of proposed Parramatta design and size**

Gladys Berejiklian needs to read the EIS and some of the documents associated with her proposed move of the museum. She will then learn that it seems:

- The proposed Parramatta site - on a flood prone riverbank - has no room for expansion - and as there's an expectation that cities and states are supposed to evolve and improve their cultural offerings - the proposed building is obviously defunct - before building has even started.
- The Ultimo Powerhouse's exhibition space is apparently being downsized in Parramatta by 75%! This will mean the vast bulk of the Powerhouse's priceless collection will never be seen - as I gather many exhibits will get placed in indefinite storage.
- It's not a move or relocation - it's decimation of an iconic collection.
- A feasibility study commissioned in March confirmed at least 15 of the museum's largest objects won't fit in the new building's goods lift.

This includes most of its steam engine collection, including NSW's first train, tram, railway carriages, helicopter, and the train indicator board that stood at Central Station directing passengers for 76 years.

And apparently it will cost almost a half-million dollars to simply move and lift one of the prize exhibits into the Parramatta Powerhouse - the iconic 26-tonne Locomotive No 1.

This illustrates the madness - and lack of foresight - with this proposal.

- Floors aren't capable of supporting the large items from the collection.
- The Parramatta Powerhouse will apparently open with no permanent collection display and no dedicated spaces for museum exhibitions.
- There is no on-site permanent storage for the museum's vast collection - with its collection of 500,000 items apparently to be kept at the Discovery Centre at Castle Hill.  
Or will the large collection be divided up, even sold?

- Further proof of the lack of commitment to a proper museum space in Parramatta is apparent when it's realised that the whole of level six of the western building is taken up with 40 serviced apartments for visiting scientists, researchers and artists - and a student dormitory is also occupying space on level one.

Why wouldn't various accommodations in and around Parramatta house such visitors - whose very core business is food and hospitality?

- Why would a museum start to branch out into this unusual business activity, providing accommodation - instead of focusing on its core business - providing exhibition space for valuable and interesting items?

(Being silly, I could ask why we don't get local hotels to exhibit museum items - and this question surely flags the ridiculousness of this accommodation inclusion in the plans).

- The proposed Parramatta site doesn't seem to have adequate climate-control for the presentation spaces - with a focus on 'comfort air conditioning' rather than providing required museum standards.

And there are large glass windows and open entrances - another air conditioning nightmare. And all this is despite it being a no-brainer that proper exhibition spaces need controlled environments regarding temperature, humidity, dust and light etc - as random temperatures and air quality control simply facilitates the deterioration of museum objects through water vapour, dust and various pollutants etc.

- There isn't one single car parking space across the 2 buildings.  
But of course there can be no parking - it's in a flood zone and I've seen how the old David Jones / Riverbank car park used to flood!  
The usual basement parking found in CBD centres cannot be allowed on this site.
- There doesn't seem to be drop-off points for the elderly and disabled?
- There are multiple entrances - a staffing and security nightmare.
- Are there adequate loading docks proposed - including coach and ambulance access - or has the Stage 2 Design Brief been breached - as well as the accepted museum standards?
- The new museum will be wrapped in lattice framework - resembling the mesh in a hair drier nozzle - or an upside down milk crate.  
Very unattractive - and I cannot believe it won a design excellence competition.  
(The 2016 Stockland proposal for its new development in Merrylands had a lattice framework exterior too - and Stockland quickly confirmed at public information sessions that the lattice work would be changed - that there had been numerous criticisms of it).
- The Powerhouse Parramatta won't house many permanent displays - due to limited space - and the desire to hold 'events' - switching spaces to accommodate a live music hall and venues for civic and corporate events, rather than being a designated museum.
- It seems there are no museum-specific exhibition spaces in the development as every 'presentation space' is required to do double duty for performances, events, functions, and commercial hire.
- The proposal is designed to support the night time economy of Parramatta, the EIS clearly indicating and referencing it's a 24 x 7 entertainment zone.
- I'm concerned (and have read) that these revolving exhibitions will be premium-ticketed events and exhibitions - yet it's a known fact that many of the people in Western Sydney earn well below the average for Greater Sydney - and will not be able to afford to regularly access the site.

The documents don't read like a museum space presenting iconic pieces of our history but rather an event space able to have multiple events for up to 10,000 people at a time - with 10 cafes and bars, retail and markets, 40 apartments, a school dormitory, numerous performances and commercial activities, with museum objects on high rotation with international travelling exhibitions.

It reads like a multi-purpose, commercially-focussed arts and entertainment complex - not the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum.

- I don't believe this proposed site can properly show off - to the world - as well as locals - all the marvellous exhibits the 'Powerhouse Ultimo' can exhibit, in its purpose built (and adapted) museum space.
- The proposed design seems to ignore the basic principles of museum planning.

Parramatta is not getting the museum it was promised, just look at the Moreau Kusunoki and Genton video marketing the proposed new design - remembering the loss of the purpose built museum in Ultimo as it's viewed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPrUffGpeos>

The proposal is ridiculous - and it's a no-brainer that this proposed relocation of the Powerhouse Museum cannot be supported - and the existing museum should remain in Ultimo.

### **Alternative, more appropriate location for a Parramatta Museum - leaving the Powerhouse in Ultimo**

In the State Infrastructure Strategy Update 2014, Infrastructure NSW proposed the development of a Parramatta Cultural Precinct and recommended that, before any further public investment was made in the Powerhouse at Ultimo, urgent consideration should be given to the Powerhouse's potential relocation to the Parramatta Cultural Precinct.

And surely this Parramatta Cultural Precinct is in North Parramatta - in the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct - at the Cumberland Hospital site!

- This site, like Ultimo, is also a landmark and an attraction in its own right - its area full of Parramatta's past - and future - and as such is a socially significant place, with recent excavations further revealing this.
- The Fleet Street Heritage Precinct / Cumberland Hospital site is large enough to properly show off our indigenous history and culture - and incorporate collections that tell the story of innovation, technological development and change in the Parramatta and Western Sydney areas - as well as in NSW.
- Like the site at Ultimo, it's a fine example of built heritage - and able to properly show large exhibits.
- It has plenty of space for changing and permanent exhibitions.
- This site is very much part of our past - fitting any historical context - indigenous culture, colonial and convict history, right up until our present day communities.
- Any museum in Parramatta should be reflecting Parramatta and Western Sydney history and subsequent development - not importing - and also destroying - a Sydney museum.
- Other countries are opening new museums - not decimating purpose built ones - that are only 30 years old - and replacing them by ones that are 75% smaller.
- For less than the cost of the proposed billion-dollar Parramatta Powerhouse project, the Premier could build Parramatta a proper museum on the Cumberland Hospital site - without trying to steal an existing museum.
- The new 'museum' could house permanent displays, galleries, artist studios, community hubs, botanic and family-orientated gardens, performance spaces, cafes etc etc - as well as the site showcasing all the existing buildings - some already under refurbishment.
- A new museum here could even loan items from the Powerhouse collection - rather than the Powerhouse items being mothballed or destroyed.

Why does page 14 of the EIS give less than half a page to mentioning an alternative location?

Why has there been no proper review of options or alternatives to the proposed suspect site?

- I understand the Parramatta Mayor, local member and Director of the Western Sydney Chamber of Commerce want to see government investment and expenditure in Parramatta and Western Sydney - and they want a museum that will be the first major NSW cultural institution based in Western Sydney.
- I also know data reflects how the arts and culture sector has been so poorly supported in the west in the past.

But the biggest spend on arts and culture infrastructure in NSW since the building of the Sydney Opera House doesn't have to be spent on moving the Powerhouse Museum - using the wrong location - at a ridiculous price.

Yes, we certainly do need government investment and expenditure in Parramatta and Western Sydney - and the arts and culture sectors certainly do need attention and support in this locale.

- Western Sydney does deserve and need a world-class cultural facility.

But the Premier needs to develop - and build - at the Cumberland Hospital site - where there is room for a whole new museum to be created in the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct - amongst all the amazing heritage buildings existing there. And the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo shouldn't be closed.

I understand the NSW Treasury has been given costings as to how this area can be transformed - for way less than the \$1.1 billion apparently needed to move the Powerhouse Museum to a ridiculous new (and unwanted) site on the Parramatta River.

- This site in North Parramatta also has a light rail stop planned - so public transport access to this site will be very good.
- And I believe even the Mayor of Parramatta has recently said that the Parramatta river bank may not be the best site for the new museum - and that if Parramatta Council had been allowed to be more involved in the proposal it would have chosen a different site!

Please note: Shouldn't the Discovery Centre at the Castle Hill site be expanded - and open a museum café at Castle Hill etc etc - and grow the Western Sydney economy in this way too?

#### **Demolition / vandalism of heritage buildings**

Two heritage-listed buildings in Parramatta - Willow Grove Villa and St George's Terraces - should not be bulldozed and demolished to make way to build the Powerhouse Parramatta.

And this demolition continues to be intended, despite the Premier committing to protecting the heritage buildings earlier this year.

The demolition would result in the total irreversible loss of these historical buildings - destroying the ability to view and use these magnificent buildings - reminding us of past architecture, past uses, past lifestyles and significant heritage.

Willow Grove should be retained and could be open to the public - perhaps part café, part museum - reflecting its varied use in the past - including stories of Parramatta's culture, history and lifestyle. (Willow Grove is an 1870s heritage villa that also became a maternity hospital for over three decades until the early 1950s).

And I've dined several times in one of the St George's Terraces – one of the seven two-storey terrace houses constructed in the 1880s. (It was always a great experience to be eating in this historical place - sometimes taking visitors to likewise enjoy the experience of the surroundings - the architecture and ambience so different to the other eateries in Parramatta).

Willow Grove and the St George's Terrace are the only examples of their type located in the core of the Parramatta CBD. The demolition of these heritage items will remove the representation of their respective architectural styles. Nothing will compensate for their demolition - casualties of this ridiculous and insensitive scheme.

Further heritage destruction in Parramatta is madness - and not acceptable.

A monster flexible event space with a residential level should not be built. And if the issue were not so serious, it would be laughable that the very construction being proposed to show heritage - is actually destroying heritage - through the further demolition of Parramatta's already diminishing heritage assets and the decimation at Ultimo.

- Willow Grove and the St George's Terrace should not be demolished
- The Powerhouse at Ultimo should not be destroyed

### **Conclusion**

My objections to the Powerhouse Parramatta stated in my submission cannot be frivolous:

- A NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the proposed relocation of the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta rejected government arguments for the move and was highly critical of the process.
- A substantial number of museum professionals believe the plans and project process for the Powerhouse Parramatta are flawed.
- High-profile Sydney arts figures don't support the proposed move.
- Some inside the Coalition party room and even within the Berejiklian cabinet itself now don't agree with the decision to keep going with the proposal.
- Museum planning standards don't seem to have been met in a number of ways.
- Museums and collections are an inter-generational responsibility - and a fundamental principle is that collections must be protected - and grown - not drastically reduced without valid reason.
- Government investment and expenditure is needed for Parramatta and Western Sydney - and the area does deserve a world-class cultural facility.
- A Parramatta museum is certainly needed but does not require the destruction of the existing facility at Ultimo - there needs to be world-class museums in both eastern and western Sydney.

Why is the NSW Premier stubbornly continuing with her desire to destroy the Powerhouse Museum?

- Even after Covid-19 has drained billions from the public purse – and will continue to do so for months, perhaps years – the Premier still wants to:
  - Vandalise the iconic Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo
  - Bulldoze and demolish 2 heritage-listed buildings in Parramatta
  - Erect an expensive new structure in Parramatta - that will not replace what will be lost.

Powerhouse Parramatta is a project that nobody seems to want – except the Premier - and the Director of the Western Sydney Business Chamber, David Borger - and Parramatta Liberal MP, Geoff Lee.

- The proposed museum development in Parramatta is at the wrong site
- The project has no chance of attracting the annual 2 million patrons indicated by the EIS
- Nobody benefits

How can the government justify the expense and its logic?

- The government needs to focus on developing the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct - the Cumberland Hospital site - which can apparently be delivered at a fraction of the cost - and has space for further expansion - as required and money is available.

Please note:

I have not made any reportable political donations.

I have no objection to my name being published with my submission.

Regards,

Gillian Kirby

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