

## **SUBMISSION – PARRAMATTA POWERHOUSE**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my objections.

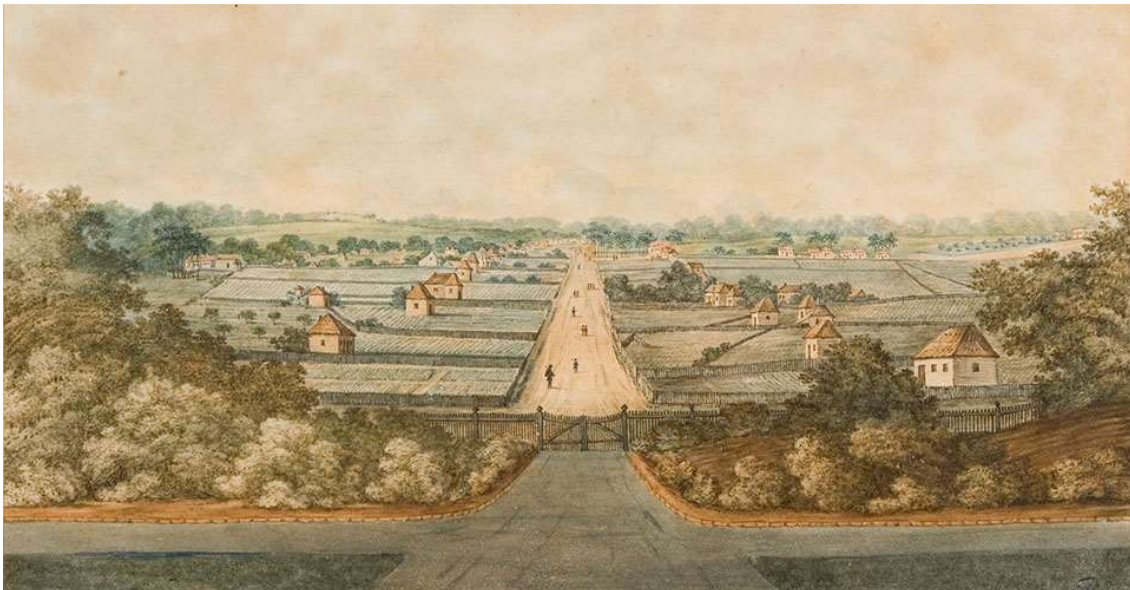
**I object to the Powerhouse Parramatta.**

**The reasons are given below.**

- 1. The impact of demolition of Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces, on the social history and the loss of sense of place and character of Parramatta has not been adequately studied and reported and taken into account in the Environmental Impact Statement.**

Parramatta is of major historical importance in the founding of Sydney and any building or landmark that reflects this must be revered, maintained and retained.

Parramatta was founded by the British in 1788, the same year as Sydney and is the second oldest European settlement in Australia apart from Sydney itself.



### **George Street Parramatta, from the gates of Government House, around 1804-5**

Government House was set up as the governor's residence and a large area around it was set aside as the Governor's Domain. It became Parramatta Park after it had been greatly reduced in size. Until the 1850s many governors preferred to rule from Parramatta.

The end of the convict regime in the 1840s left a legacy of major convict era buildings including Lunatic Asylum (Female Factory), Benevolent Asylum (George Street convict barracks) Lancer Barracks (former military barracks), and Parramatta Gaol.

By the 1870s Parramatta was a holiday destination into the 1910s centred on a pleasant landscape of farms and orchards with the river and hills nearby. Parramatta in those days was considered more genteel than much of the eastern or northern suburbs of Sydney, which I know from second hand accounts from my forebears.

The retention of many historic sites in the early 20th century ensured the survival of its historical fabric. Demolition of Willow Grove and St George Terraces will significantly impact on the historical fabric of Parramatta.



## **2. The importance of Willow Grove to the local history and to women's history as a maternity hospital is being ignored**

The overall cumulative impacts of further heritage destruction in Parramatta currently being undertaken, make Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces vital to retain for community sense of place.

Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces are rare examples of architecture that no longer exist in Parramatta CBD and should be retained.

Willow Grove was built in the 1870s as a Victorian Italianate two-storey villa at 32 Phillip Street. It is heritage listed. It is of significance for historical, aesthetic, research, associative and representativeness values. It is a "notable residence", a good, representative example of a Victorian Italianate two-storey villa, readily identifiable as part of the historic building stock.

This Victorian Italianate house was registered as a private hospital known as "Estella" when a Mrs E.E. Davidson, a midwife purchased the property in 1919.

It is a local landmark, strongly contributing to the streetscape. It is a place of memories for many long term residents of the area, including from years when it operated as a maternity hospital.

The site grounds may contain archaeological material relating to European settlement prior to the construction of 'Willow Grove'.



### **3. History of St George's Terrace and Potential Archaeological Site is being ignored**

As per the Office of Environment and heritage the row of terraces at 44 Phillip Street, Parramatta is of significance to the Parramatta LGA for historical and aesthetic reasons and as a representative example of modest Victorian period terraces constructed during an early wave of development in the area.

The group presents as having a relatively high degree of integrity when viewed from the street and strongly contributes to the Phillip Street streetscape and the character of the Parramatta townscape, additionally in unison with other historic buildings nearby. The buildings meet SHR Criteria – historically significant, a) SHR Criteria – aesthetically significant c) SHR Criteria g) -representative when assessed against the State Heritage Register to determine the level of significance.



### **4. Environmental Impact Statement | 02 June 2020 Ethos Urban considers that the above sites have major heritage significance - yet they are being demolished.**

*“The demolition of Willow Grove and St George’s Terrace would have a significant physical and visual impact on the heritage significance of the heritage items, resulting in a total irreversible loss of the conservation values including significant fabric and the visual setting.*

*The removal of vegetation on the site within the Willow Grove curtilage will also impact the cultural significance of this place and its garden setting.*

*When considered against its context, Willow Grove is the only one of its kind within the core of the Parramatta CBD, meaning its demolition would have a significant impact on representation of this architectural style in this particular location.*

*St George’s Terrace, as a collective group, is also the only remaining example of this style located in the Parramatta CBD, recognising that whilst there are other examples in the Parramatta CBD these are typically single storey terraces or are attached rather than a complete row.*

The EIS goes on to recommend mitigation, assuming inevitable demolition, the potential acquisition of fabric from demolished heritage items into the Powerhouse Collections

Destroying heritage buildings in order to replace them with a museum showing a few sad remnants of said heritage buildings does not make sense. It is bizarre and Pythonesque.

## **1. Museum experts consider the proposed Parramatta Powerhouse inadequate to house museum objects**

The MAAS website claims *“The new Powerhouse will deliver Australia’s first dedicated learning space devoted to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics). And centre stage will be a selection of the collection’s over 500,000 objects, applied to tell stories, engage communities and encourage lifelong learning. A new curatorial strategy will focus on integrated and immersive programs that promote interaction and inspire and connect people of all ages and backgrounds.”*

This is incorrect and completely ignores the fact that there will be no permanent exhibition space in Parramatta Powerhouse, that it is on a flood plain and that moving many of the exhibits from the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo to the proposed building on the proposed site will be costly, difficult and probably impossible.

There are no designated spaces for museum exhibitions. The only curating in the building will be food programs. There is no designated space for collection management. There is no collection storage space. There is no conservation lab. Collection management and exhibition installation is supposed to share spaces that are also designated for catering, dressing rooms, roadies and technical preparation. This is untenable for any serious museum. The back of house is grossly inadequate and in the wrong spaces. Corridors and lift vestibules are counted as back of house and staff offices.

Of the AA museum standard spaces, P3 above the ground floor in the west building will mainly be used for talks and performance, not exhibitions. That leaves just P4 and P5 as potential exhibition spaces, also available for commercial hire and performances. Of the remaining presentation spaces P7 is a commercial conference and function space, not suitable for museum exhibitions; the P6space is for immersive digital experiences, and the ground floor flood space P1 exposed to flood and open to the river. It is unsuitable for museum objects and exhibitions.

The eastern building has no escalators, only two regular lifts and stairs, contrary to the Stage 2 Design Brief requirements. This will compromise visitor movement to the upper floors and spaces P2 and P4, as well as the education facilities. It will also create evacuation risks. Incredibly, the large P1 space for major events and concerts is not accessible from the loading dock.

There is only one loading dock to support a building holding multiple events for up to 10,000 people. This is also contrary to the Stage 2 Design Brief and accepted museum standards.

The Parramatta site is in a high risk flood zone. The development poses grave and insoluble risks to visitor safety. It is not consistent with relevant flood policies and plans, or with Parramatta Council’s DCP and LEP.

The new building is not a museum It is a flexible commercial event space with a residential floor that will demolish our already diminishing heritage assets, Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces.

## **5. The economic value of heritage is being ignored with the proposed demolition of Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces**

It is extremely sad that Australian heritage architecture is seen as somewhat passé as everything these days is reduced to a number contributing to the Gross Domestic Product.



However heritage buildings do have considerable economic value but must be retained in context not destroyed. Visiting sites of historical importance or even spending the night in them in some cases can play a key role in the choice of travel destination.

These sites are a critical element of the visitor economy. They attract visitors, create reasons to stay longer and add depth to the visitor experience. Visitors to cultural and heritage sites are a high yielding segment as they are known to spend more and stay longer than the average traveller.

In the year ending December 2015, over 2 million international visitors visited an historic/heritage building, site or monument, representing 33.3 per cent of all visitors to Australia. In addition, domestic tourists made 4.9 million overnight trips and 4.1 million day trips to a historic/heritage building, site or monument during 2015 (Tourism & Transport Forum Australia).

Trips which include heritage tourism elements enable visitors to incorporate authentic, cultural experiences into their itineraries, likely to improve their overall visitor experience.

Given the vital importance Parramatta played in the early history of Australia, its heritage is of major economic potential however this is being obliterated by the ongoing destruction of its considerable heritage assets over the years by a tsunami of unsympathetic development. The impending demolition Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces adds further to the destruction of the heritage economy of Parramatta.

#### **6. Most advocates for the current site for the proposed Parramatta Powerhouse have no long term cultural connection with Parramatta.**

The current MAAS Board of Trustees was selected since 2015. Five new trustees were selected in 2019. The Board of Trustees does not contain any person that has any cultural connection to Parramatta nor do they have significant museum background.

Certain academics from University of Western Sydney who are also in favour of the current site for the Parramatta powerhouse were brought into the University sector in Western Sydney a few years ago from interstate and have no longstanding cultural connection to Parramatta or to western Sydney.

The argument from certain sections of government and other sources that the proposed site for the Parramatta Powerhouse is being opposed by cultural elites from other parts of Sydney, apart from being an ad hominem fallacy, is simply incorrect. Moreover it is the politicians and academics who are the elites.

#### **7. The people of Parramatta oppose the current site and the demolition of St Georges Terraces and Willow Grove**

It is in fact the people of Parramatta such as the North Parramatta Heritage Action Group and other groups in Parramatta are opposing the site because it will involve the destruction of two significant heritage buildings. Parramatta Council wants the retention of Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces.

14,000 people signed a petition in just under a week calling on the Premier to protect Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces;

#### **8. Heritage experts universally condemn the decision to demolish Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces**

Historic House Association and National Trust of Australia (NSW) condemn the governments decisions they have continued on this path of destruction of Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces.

## **9. There are significant problems with the jury selection for the winning design**

The jury to select a design was itself selected by the NSW State Government thus carries a potential for conflict of interest and did not include any heritage architects. No member of the jury had a significant cultural connection with Parramatta.

The jury included a property industry consultant, two overseas architects and an indigenous adviser from a Tasmanian indigenous background. The City Architect on the jury was appointed to Parramatta Council in September 2015. It is not revealed as to which members of the jury actually visited the site or had any knowledge of the history of St Georges Terraces and Willow Grove which the design proposed to demolish.

## **10. My cultural connections with Parramatta and the Powerhouse**

I grew up in North Parramatta with a single parent during the 1970s and 1980s near Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces. Parramatta Park was my playground. The streets I ran around were lined with large sandstone blocks and numerous old and well established trees lined the footpaths.

My grandparents and maternal great grandparents all grew up in Parramatta along with numerous other relatives. My grandparents lived in a 100 year old home that was sadly demolished for development in the 1980s.

My former neighbour continues to reside in a house built by her great grandfather which is threatened by the high density development planned to destroy the remaining historic streetscapes of North Parramatta.

On the paternal side, I am a first generation Australian with forebears who fled Eastern Europe for various reasons and essentially lost a large part of their cultural heritage (and their families).

My Parramatta heritage is now being lost with the ongoing destruction of Willow Grove, St Georges Terraces....combined with the demolishment of the Parramatta War Memorial swimming pool, the 200 years old Royal Oak hotel, the gradual resumption of Parramatta Parklands for various purposes, the rezoning of North Parramatta for high density and the loss of countless non heritage listed historic homes throughout Parramatta

The relentlessly encroaching development, multi storey towers, and various concrete constructions progressively obliterating the historic sense of Parramatta is extremely distressing to me personally.

I also visited the Powerhouse at Ultimo many times, travelling from Parramatta. I spent many hours there with family and friends on countless occasions. Subsequently I took my own child to the Powerhouse many times. She was sad when her favourite physics exhibit was replaced by a fashion show.

## **11. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for “Powerhouse Parramatta”, currently on exhibition, is now invalid**

The NSW Government’s original project to move the Powerhouse to Parramatta was supported by a controversial business case and was withdrawn on 4 July 2020.

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for “Powerhouse Parramatta”, currently on exhibition, is now clearly invalid and inapplicable and should be cancelled immediately, since it describes a project (moving the Powerhouse to Parramatta) which the Government has now decided not to do.

To be legitimate, a new business case must be written that must follow, and be based on, extensive and transparent community consultation.

Equally, any future project in Ultimo, that would involve altering the Turbine and Boiler halls and/or remove large objects from these halls and/or alter the Harwood building's collection storage and curation facilities cannot be pursued without a valid business case including genuine, documented community consultation.

## **Conclusions**

IN PARRAMATTA, the government must:

- respect residents' demands for a world-standard museum reflecting Parramatta history and culture, that does not involve demolishing heritage listed buildings ideally built in the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct.

This would create as many construction and permanent jobs as the current Powerhouse project, at only a fraction of the cost to the taxpayer.

IN ULTIMO the government must focus on restoring the museum to its former internationally acclaimed status by:

- implementing the necessary repairs/maintenance works urgently.
- re-hiring qualified staff with genuine museum experience (as opposed to events and/or art gallery professionals).

I object to the Powerhouse Parramatta project for the reasons given above.

Parramatta needs the right museum in the right place that does not involve destruction of valuable and culturally important heritage assets, namely Willow Grove and St George's Terraces.

I confirm that I have not made any reportable political donations to any political organisation. I do not have any financial interest in the planning application.

I do not want my name published with this submission.

Yours faithfully,



11 July 2020