

21 July 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Powerhouse Parramatta EIS (SSD-10416)

I object to the Parramatta Powerhouse for the following reasons:

Demolition of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace

Willow Grove and St George's Terrace enhance Parramatta and are of high social significance. They must remain central to any reimagining of our city to ensure we incorporate the past in the present.

Willow Grove was built c.1870 and has been a private home, private hospital and business premises. Willow Grove is the only Victorian Italianate residence in the heart of Parramatta. St George's Terrace was built in 1881 as a row of seven two-storey Victorian terrace houses most recently used as commercial premises.

In 2014-15 the Parramatta City Council acquired four sites including Willow Grove and St George's Terrace that were considered key to its River Strategy. A Strategy that envisioned a makeover of the foreshore delivering more passive and active recreational space as well as a location to host outdoor events.

When the Council was sacked, the NSW Government used this opportunity to proceed with their proposal to relocate the Powerhouse. When a new Councillor body was elected in 2017, they unanimously supported the incorporation of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace in any future proposal for the Museum of Applied Arts and Science (MAAS/Powerhouse) and met with the Minister for Arts and Heritage to share their concerns and request that retention of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace be a requirement of the brief for the design competition. The fact the design brief failed to condition the retention of the heritage buildings meant that there was a significant risk to these buildings from the outset.

Flooding

In February the proposed museum site was flooded. This was less than 12 months since the previous major flood event in our city. The EIS states that the site for the Powerhouse Parramatta is a 1 in 100-year flood zone but during several on-line

forums during the public exhibition period I asked representatives from Infrastructure NSW who conceded that parts of the site are in fact 1 in 20-year flood zone.

How can it be appropriate to place an EIS on exhibition when the assessment of such a significant issue is inaccurate?

There are also serious concerns about the evacuation plans for the site. In fact, the EIS states that the evacuation plan is not a requirement of the EIS and will be developed at the detailed design stage. The evacuation plan should be part of the EIS and placed on public exhibition.

River Strategy

The City of Parramatta spent years developing a River Strategy that linked the CBD to the river and developed a pedestrian Civic Link as the connection. The EIS fails to realise the intentions of both the River Strategy and Civic Link. Instead of a clear line of sight from Parramatta Square to the river there will be a building mass obstructing the view. Rather than a green open space down to the river providing an area for mass open air gatherings the design on exhibition removes all existing trees and creates harsh barriers between the building and the river. Instead of open-air space for community gatherings it delivers an undercroft that by its very design raises serious safety concerns.

Alternatives

This project will result in the loss of significant heritage on the Powerhouse Parramatta site. In line with Section 4.15(1)(e) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, the EIS must consider other alternate sites and their suitability for this project. The EIS fails to achieve this and therefore is a flawed process.

The failure to investigate a museum in the Cumberland Heritage precinct that incorporates the Parramatta Female Factory is disappointing. This is a National Heritage listed site that is equivalent to Sydney's Macquarie Street. It is the first purpose built Female Factory in the world and a model for the twelve other female factories around Australia. Commissioned by Governor Macquarie and designed by Francis Greenway it is the earliest convict women's site surviving in Australia. With a light rail running directly through the Cumberland Heritage precinct it makes the museum a prime location for a world-class cultural institution that embraces our past and provides a site capable of housing a magnificent new museum sympathetic to its heritage surrounds.

There are other alternatives including a museum with a smaller footprint on the same riverbank site that incorporates Willow Grove and St George's Terrace. Alternatively, a museum precinct could be developed on this river site in conjunction with the site of the Riverside Theatre, again allowing for the incorporation of the heritage and establishing a completely new performing arts and museum precinct.

Objectives of the Powerhouse Parramatta

The EIS was placed on exhibition based on a premise that the Powerhouse in Ultimo was closing and relocating to Parramatta. Since the exhibition period commenced this has changed thus questioning the validity of the entire EIS process.

This also raises questions about the objectives of the new Powerhouse Parramatta. With the 'backflip' decision to retain the Powerhouse in Ultimo, will there be any permanent exhibitions in Parramatta? What will be the key themes and objectives of the new Powerhouse? It is appreciated that the proposal is to create a new institution with lots of flexible space but for such a significant project, funded primarily with tax-payers money, the lack of detail is unacceptable. There are too many unanswered questions. The EIS appears rushed and is lacking.

In conclusion, the State Government must accept that Parramatta needs and deserves investment in an arts and cultural institution but not at the expense of our heritage.

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