

Powerhouse Project

I am writing to express my concern at the continuing work on the move to relocate the Powerhouse museum to Parramatta. I OBJECT TO THIS PROJECT AND I STRONGLY DISAGREE with this move and the waste of public funds.

I am not happy with the plans to demolish Parramatta's much loved heritage buildings Wattle Grove and St George's Terrace, to put a museum there - especially when there are alternative community visions for an Arts and Cultural Precinct for a Museum at the 26 hectare Fleet Street Heritage Precinct in North Parramatta. It is a disgrace that this government refuse to listen to what the electorate want. Parramatta certainly want a museum that reflects the rich indigenous, colonial and multicultural past of this city. The powerhouse represents a completely different narrative which belongs right where it is in the heart of Sydney city. Top all that off with the wanton destruction of the remaining heritage in Parramatta, as noted in the EIS section 6.6.3 and 8.2.2 means that the project is unacceptable. I feel the project has massively underestimated the impact and loss to the sense of place of Parramatta. This is hinted at in section 8.2.2, and is especially evident as the primary study area is only 1 KM radius of the site. Parramatta is a city that is integral to many, many thousands of people outside of that narrow radius and I am one of them. I feel a huge impact from the project's decisions, and the cumulative effect from all the projects collectively in Parramatta, which are not sensitive to the local community sentiments.

The recent webinar consultations held in early April 2020, are of great concern with their lack of understanding of community issues, as reported by local community groups who attended and from the limited material in the presentation pack (see <http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/2440/new-powerhouse-in-parramatta-planning-presentation.pdf?fbclid=IwAR22Oxgba1z1MS-W4BT1wcrdA1aliaLMlnl4BcngRsShf4aglhufMVYeIP4>).

My fear is that this project continues and we will loose the opportunity for a more common-sense community led project. In fact, there was comment by our local community group and city councillors on how little the project is sounding like a museum, with the presentation outlining 40 residential apartments on top floor, 60 dorm beds for schools to stay overnight, a floor of retail and cafes and the rest of area being described as flexible event functions and exhibition space. This information only STRENGTHENS the case for the project to be cancelled, in the admission that the project is not going to be a museum.

Of course, the whole idea of relocating a well respected and working museum, robbing one area of Sydney for another, is purely a whim of the government to allow repurposing of an inner city space by developers. Why not have TWO museums, each with separate purposes. One - the Powerhouse, reflecting our technological, artistic and scientific heritage as required by The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Act, and another - at Fleet Street – the Museum of NSW - reflecting the unique nature of Parramatta as the link between indigenous, colonial and mulitcultural Australia. I note that Fleet Street heritage precinct is included in the move presentation, but no details of how this will be incorporated were forthcoming. Why not scale back to just the cultural precinct at Fleet Street and give the people what they want, and at the same time retaining the sense of place and cultural identity from the preservation of Wattle Grove and St George's Terrace!

I believe that within Fleet Street, the Female Factory and surrounding buildings and gardens are part of the fabric that make Australia what it is today - a co-joining of aboriginal, convict and free settlers - especially the women who had to endure the experience of the factory as their only means of surviving in this colony. A museum and cultural centre showcasing the history of this building, and the surrounding crucial heritage areas is a MINIMUM solution, to which only a portion of the funds of the Powerhouse move would more than adequately provide. We have many community vision statements and proposals for the alternatives to the Powerhouse Museum move - please listen to us, the people of Parramatta, who you claim to be providing for in all your communications - LISTEN AND ACT FOR US PLEASE!!

The impact to the social history of Parramatta, already stated in the EIS as cumulative with the impacts to the Royal Oak and Fleet Street precinct heritage, which creates a loss of sense of place and character of Parramatta, has become a depressive pall over our city. On the back of the loss of the Memorial Pool for the building of the new stadium, it would appear that Parramatta's cultural

identity is of little significance to the State Government. This is what I object to on the basis that my cultural identity, as a resident of Parramatta area for 60 years, has little value to the current elected government. The EIS has not adequately considered the impact to long term residents and future generations of the loss of the cultural identity.

There are historical similarities in the decisions of this project to the short sighted demolition of many of Sydney's heritage buildings in the past, which have led to a renewed appreciation for heritage which remains. We in Parramatta feel privileged and do not want to become a future exhibit in a museum which tallies once again the lost heritage – see Demolished Sydney
<https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/stories/unlocked-demolished-sydney>

This project has similar tonality to the decision to demolish the QVB for a car park – how close we came to losing a national treasure – but we were able to pull back – PLEASE PULL BACK NOW! See
<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/once-a-monstrosity-sydney-s-queen-victoria-building-is-now-a-treasure-20180717-p4zrzv.html>

These sentiments should ring warning bells for the government, as heritage is a vital factor in many cultures identity. As someone of Lebanese background, we feel heritage is very important in our culture and our “new home” of Australia (my great grandmother came to Australia in the 1890s)! The places we go as children hold significance to our future generations as well. I would love to show my grandchildren the wonderful Willow Grove where I have spent many an afternoon during Lanes festivals, or St George's Terrace where I have had wonderful meals in Nona's Italian. Not too far from the Roxy Theatre where, as a teenager and later with my wife over many years, I had many afternoons and evenings at the cinema. This is the fabric of our lives – they are not just buildings. Our heritage deserves to be celebrated along with the aboriginal culture, colonial experience and immigrant cultures who have call this part of Australia home – in their own museum in a culturally more realistic setting at North Parramatta. Leave the City of Parramatta to devise a new model for their River Square that incorporates the heritage of the area, not destroys it.

In the business case papers for the relocation Ref:

http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/1539/maas_fbc_summary.pdf it states:

In the State Infrastructure Strategy Update 2014, Infrastructure NSW proposed the development of a Parramatta Cultural Precinct³ and recommended that, before any further public investment was made in the Powerhouse, urgent consideration should be given to MAAS's potential relocation to the Parramatta Cultural Precinct. This was later reinforced in the Cultural Infrastructure Strategy 2016, in which Infrastructure NSW commented that the proposed relocation presented “an opportunity to develop a vibrant creative and cultural precinct” in the heart of Parramatta.⁴

And more importantly, that the business case rests upon allowing extensive development at both Ultimo and Parramatta - not yet rejected by any proposal since

Integral to the Business Case and the financial analysis it contains is the ability to partially offset the Project's costs by divesting a portion of the Riverbank site to facilitate residential development. The Business Case includes a Development Options Assessment which examines a range of options for residential, commercial and mixed use development on the Riverbank site and estimates the revenues associated with each, along with revenues from property development on part of MAAS's current premises at Ultimo. These revenues are then factored into the Business Case's financial and economic analysis.

Please revisit the 2014 case proposal for more funds for the Ultimo Powerhouse, and subsequent strategy documents, given the cost of the move is now far more than was originally anticipated. You can still have stimulus for the economy under the umbrella of "museum development", just not this style or project! Weighed up against necessary funds for improving the current Powerhouse, an assumption that a move to Parramatta would be beneficial culturally and financially, is now seen to be quite invalid. All the decision making proposals referred to had not anticipated the current economic circumstances of fires, floods and pandemic. They had not anticipated the current mood of the population of Parramatta and Western Sydney for their OWN cultural museum and space to reflect THEIR unique heritage. They had not anticipated the ground swell of criticism from all manner of respected associations who have since criticised this move on a number of fronts. Put simply, the business case, the only one put forward for this project, is no longer valid and requires complete

review. This business case must now be rejected. Considering the shameful waste of funds for such a move and the need for drought, bushfire and pandemic relief, one can only assume the premier and infrastructure NSW is being wilfully ignorant. Stop this project NOW!!

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