

Questions for the government regarding the Powerhouse museum 'move'

Pymont History Group, Powerhouse Museum interest group.
Spokesperson: Tom Lockley

Presented to Mr Craig Limkin, Executive Director – Cultural Infrastructure
Program Management Office

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Comments and suggestions welcome ...
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See also: <http://lockoweb.com/phm/>

Introduction

Yesterday I was assured by Mr Price, the Executive Support Officer at MAAS, that our questions on this issue would be answered, not completely ignored by the government, as has been the case with the questions asked at the 'consultation' meetings last July. Not one of our significant questions was answered, or even acknowledged, as part of the 'consultation'.

Please note that I am also a museum volunteer, of nine years' experience. These questions draw on the experience and knowledge of people far more qualified and far more experienced than I.

Based on the assurances made by Mr Price, we have, however tried to prepare an up-to-date summary of many questions that urgently require answers.

Please feel free to ring me for clarification of any matter, any time, on 0403 615 134.

Most of these questions can be answered with the help of a few mouse clicks from governmental records, so we hope for some response. We suggest that answers be circulated as they become available.

Tom Lockley

The basic question:

The absolutely crucial question is why the government has made a determination that the Powerhouse Museum will be relocated to the banks of the Parramatta River. The overwhelming circumstantial evidence is that this was completely unresearched. Clear evidence also indicates that this idea wastes hundreds of millions of taxpayer funds and destroys unique heritage assets. How can this incompetence be excused? If the previous assertions are incorrect, why has the government not released some proof of their competence during the 3 years, six months and nine days since the project was announced? What further non-violent, democratic actions are left to us to reverse this totalitarian and incompetent edict?

General questions:

Many are substantially the same as those previously asked, and they are indicated by **

We asked many questions at the last consultative meeting but none have been answered. Why not?

How is it that none of our questions were answered, yet the *Daily Telegraph* has been fed details of what is happening in advance? For example, the establishment of the Planetarium, and the proposed use of the present building for a theatre performance space?

Why has the matter of the preferred site not been discussed by the new elected Parramatta Council? It should be noted that one of the last acts of the previous elected council was to ask that the selected site be retained as open space. This had been their consistent policy. See <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/what-the-experts->

[say/parramatta-council-minutes-document-early-concerns-for-proposed-relocation-of-the-powerhouse-museum-tom-lockley/](#)

Study of recent council minutes indicate that not only has the land matter not been discussed, but also that the elected council has had no debate, and passed no resolution supporting the 'move'. Why not? Why can the Mayor and the government claim the support of Council for this 'move'?

****Why have we not seen the full business cases and the material on which they were based? We the taxpayers paid for them and if it is such a good idea why don't we see the proof of this?**

****If the Business Plans are withheld, what is the objection to releasing the facts presented to the government by the specialist consultants that have been employed to prepare the business plans?**

****Why is there no evidence of wide consultation and research about the basic move idea? There is evidence that not even the MAAS Trustees, or the Director of MAAS were consulted before the announcement was made. The National Trust, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites, Museums Australia and Museums NSW are among the many organisations that oppose the move and have suggested better alternatives. Other groups opposing the move include the Design Institute of Australia, the North Parramatta Residents Action Group, the Professional Historians Association of NSW, the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials, the National Association of Visual Arts, Museums and Galleries Australia, the Australian Ceramics Association, the Australian Society for History of Engineering and Technology, Engineers Australia, Engineers Australia NSW División, and the Greater Western Sydney Action Heritage Group. Why has no notice been taken of their reasoned arguments against the move? Can you tell us of all the organisations that are in favour of the move?**

****There is clear evidence that even the destruction of the Powerhouse museum and consequent resale of the land would not provide any significant amount of surplus funds that can be put towards the erection of a suitable museum at Parramatta. The removal and appropriate storage of the exhibits alone will cost the amount received from the site sale. If this is wrong, why don't you release your figures to prove this?**

****PHM and its buildings are extraordinarily valuable items of national heritage. What value is being placed on this aspect of the 'move' idea?**

****Can we be assured that suitable investigations have been regarding the logistics of the 'move'? Matters that immediately come to mind include major items such as the Boulton and Watt, the Catalina, the air ambulance, the Apollo rocket engine. The cast iron of the Boulton and Watt engine, for example, is extremely fragile. The care of smaller items is also a matter for grave concern. Peter Root was largely responsible for setting up the current museum and has been a consultant for the preparation of the business case. Will you publish the terms of reference given to the consultants and the reports that they gave, especially the work of Peter Root and associates? If not, why not?**

****In view of the fact that over recent years, there have been many staff cuts, particularly of trained curators, are enough expert staff available to handle this enormous move? We would also like to see the publication of the protocols to be used in moving these valuable materials.**

****There is overwhelming evidence that Parramatta citizens and organisations would prefer other alternatives, eg development of the Fleet Street precinct, to the erection of a new museum building on the suggested site, with skyscraper development of Fleet Street. Why is this being ignored?**

****Concern remains about flooding of the Parramatta site. This is a potential major flaw in the move plan. Is there really no better alternative? Can the scientific studies made on this matter be released? If not, why not? We have many volunteers with experience in these matters who would like to check for themselves that the available data has been properly used.**

The government has stated that over 500,000 individuals and businesses have been consulted and that the consequent conclusion was drawn that there was overwhelming support for the 'move'. Can we have full details of the manner of consultation and the results that have been obtained? What sort of information about the project was given to the respondents to enable them to make a reasoned judgement? Can you give independent assessors access to the consultation reports of these 500 000 people? Were they collected by researchers or were they online surveys? Can you provide the websites involved? We are unable to locate more than ten or twenty people that have been subjects of research studies conducted by government agencies and, as at the sham 'consultation' meetings held last July, they were asked what they wanted to see in the new museum at Parramatta, never the basic question of should the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences be moved to Parramatta, or what alternatives were preferred. This is very poor practice. Can the government provide evidence to the contrary?

In our previous question booklet we proved that no attempt was made by Parramatta Council under administration to conduct research until some time after March 2017.

****Why were there no council representatives on the relevant committee for at least the first two years of the project planning? (see the list of steering committee members on <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryOther/Transcript/10346/Answers%20to%20questions%20on%20notice%20-%20Arts%20NSW%20-%2028%20September%202016.pdf>). Could the relevant authorities provide a list of all (if any) Parramatta people who participate in planning committees since September 2016? Please also provide the method of selection of these people and the terms of reference of the committees.**

The Daily Telegraph on April 18 this year referred to a SECRET report, prepared in 2014, that showed that \$500 million was needed to make repairs to the Powerhouse building to overcome water leaks, mould etc. Why is this so vastly different from the NSW Infrastructure Recreation and Arts Baseline Report prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers in June 2012, and why is it so different from our experience as volunteers? This is the only thing we have seen that gives a reason for the move, so if it exists why is it not released for us to see and examine?

The Daily Telegraph on April 18 said that the current museum was inadequate for many purposes. Can you please tell us of exhibitions that have had to be declined because of bad facilities, and if the area of the Wran building additions was already inadequate, why was it reduced by a third by the recent building of a classroom in this area?

The present museum, according to *The Daily Telegraph*, is uninviting and there is regular and persistent feedback to this effect from the clients. Our experience is that people are impressed

by the heritage of the building, and particularly by its history and the relevance of many exhibits to this particular structure, and the amazing standards of workmanship. Can we see the research that says that criticism of the building outweighs the appreciation of this wonderful heritage building?

Can we see the regular and persistent feedback referred to in *The Telegraph* of April 18 that people say that the museum uninviting and does not deliver a contemporary cultural experience? If that is the case, why has there been no effort to update the signage etc in the traditional areas of the museum?

****Can the government produce any scientific evidence, or name any expert individual or group, that informed the Government's strategic decision in 2015 to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta? The move was suggested in the infrastructure report issued on 3 November 2015 and Mr Baird announced the government's strategic decision on November 28 but we cannot find any research or investigation that was carried out during this period. We can provide a comprehensive list of suitable researchers that were not engaged for this purpose.**

****The volunteers and employees have been asked to 'toe the party line' and support the government policy in regard to the 'move' in our interactions with the public. This may give the impression that the volunteers and indeed the staff are in favour of the 'move'. There is considerable evidence that this is far from the case. One senior volunteer carried out a survey that indicated that there was a strong majority of volunteers opposing the 'move'. Can we be assured that there will be no implication in any statements about the 'move' that it has support of volunteers?**

****Will the museum continue as Australia's only museum of Arts and Sciences, and if so what is the rationale for moving it from the current position, which is far more accessible from intrastate, interstate and overseas? Or is it intended to abandon the idea of an institution dedicated to the linkages, and resulting synergies, between sciences and the applied arts? The exploitation of these linkages will be increasingly important in the world of the future.**

Questions arising from *New Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta*:



This impression of the new building does not show any tower residential area in the site, which has been suggested. Also the lower level entries are clearly below even moderate flood levels. Why?

Please explain why the facilities planned for this museum cannot be far more easily made available in the existing museum at Ultimo.

Questions arising from the *Press Statement 28 April*:

We have heard loud and clear that the people want a major cultural institution in Western Sydney. This is true, and applies also to the supporters of the Ultimo Powerhouse. However, no evidence has been found that people specifically want the Powerhouse Museum at Parramatta. Can the government explain why this is the preferred project?

Questions arising from the so-called *Business Plan summary*:

1. The Government plans to retain cultural space at Ultimo. It is separately considering the options for the Ultimo site, including the establishment of a Creative Industries Precinct and a plan for a Design and Fashion museum and a Broadway-style lyric theatre. Where is the plan for the area, plus the needs analysis? Or is this yet another 'thought bubble' idea?
2. The Business Case for the Powerhouse Museum in Western Sydney Project was prepared between April and December 2017 by the Cultural Infrastructure Program Management Office (CIPMO) within the Arts, Screen and Culture Division of the NSW Government's Department of Planning and Environment. Please explain why the NSW parliament was told later on that this material was not available.
3. *The Business Case takes as its starting point the Government's decision to locate the Powerhouse Museum on the Riverbank site in Parramatta.* This development on this site was opposed by the elected council prior to the administrator, when at their last meeting they passed Resolution 16646, Minutes, 9 May 2016 (p22), one of several resolutions to this effect passed by the elected council. The land deal was signed by the non-elected administrator a matter of days before the elected council could act. Why did the state not wait for the elected council to negotiate this matter? The task of the administrator is to act as caretaker, not policy maker.

4. *The three options ... are based on international benchmarking and consumer preference research. May we see it please?*
5. *All three [proposals] encompass levels of functionality consistent with a "Museum of International Standard", including a large scale touring hall for temporary exhibitions, temporary and permanent galleries for the display of the MAAS collection, dedicated education spaces, a library and research space, auditorium facilities to host lectures and other public events, and associated food and beverage facilities and visitor amenities. Is it not true that the present museum has all these facilities also? So why destroy it?*
6. *The decision before Government, therefore, can be characterised as a choice between two worthwhile investment options, trading off the superior customer experiences of Option 3 against the lower capital cost offered by the smaller Option 1. Why are there not other options, such as those suggested by NPRAG and other groups?*
7. *Infrastructure NSW has conducted a number of reviews of the Powerhouse Museum project as it has developed, including a review of the Business Case undertaken in February 2018. Why can't we see them?*
8. *This review critically examined a number of the assumptions underlying the economic appraisal and BCRs in the Business Case, and required sensitivity testing of those assumptions to be undertaken. What assumptions? May we receive the report, please?*
9. *We also believe that the cases have been subject to 'peer review'. If the government refuses to release their review, please at least name the reviewer(s), give their/his/her terms of reference, and state the duration of the review and the location and disposition of their/his/her report.*
10. *In February 2015, the then NSW Premier and Deputy Premier announced the Government's decision to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. Is this not an error? See Parramatta Advertiser November 26, 2014: The Powerhouse Museum will move from Ultimo to Parramatta to provide Western Sydney with better access to science and technology education. After months of speculation, Premier Mike Baird made the announcement today as part of a plan to boost cultural offerings outside of central Sydney.*
11. *On p3 under the heading Strategic context and on p 4 under the heading 'Problem Description' it is implied that the MAAS Trustees triggered the relocation proposal: eg comment on p3 regarding the 2014 MAAS Business Case, arguing that the current operations at Ultimo were becoming unsustainable; the comment on p3 that MAAS initiated and led the development of the planning framework; on p3 that in mid-2016 MAAS commenced work on the preparation of a Business Case for the relocation; on p4 the comment that the MAAS has argued its existing premises...which is reaching the end of its useful life and is no longer fit for purpose; on p8 the phrasing of the statement regarding A Collections Relocation and Logistics Report... could be interpreted as having been prepared by the MAAS; on p4 a statement is made that the MAAS is increasingly struggling to meet its obligations under the MAAS Act...*
Yet in UH transcript of Monday, 14 November 2016. Page 36, Professor Shine stated: Along with my fellow trustees and the then museum director, I became aware of the proposal to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to a cultural precinct planned for Parramatta through the publication of the State Infrastructure Strategy in 2014. We request that documentation of the trustees' initiative in this matter be produced. Otherwise, can the government please

confirm that the 'move' initiative is entirely their own, and that they have responsibility for its appalling quality?

12. The business case summary, eg table 1 page 8 contains no information about how the figures were obtained. They might as well have been plucked out of the air for all the information they give about the business case. How can anyone make a rational judgement of the validity of the business case when absolutely no supporting research is available?
13. Once again the question is asked as to why the business case is 'Cabinet in confidence'. This should only apply to discussions made within the cabinet, leading to the convention that Cabinet speaks with one voice, having deliberated the matter in question and determined a policy. This government has extended it to denying information about the business case itself, and the consultant's terms of reference and reports that contribute to the business case, and even to material such as that provided by Peter Root Associates to assist the consultants.

The business case details released show no analysis of the present situation.

We had wondered why the business case did not examine alternative strategies, as required by Treasury Paper tpp 08-5, *Guidelines for the Construction of Business Cases*, but the government's arbitrary act of choosing this one option for improving the cultural facilities of Western Sydney has precluded the effectiveness of this requirement. Why?

14. The aim of the project is to improve the cultural facilities of Western Sydney. The government has pre-empted any discussion of alternative ways of proceeding. Why were alternatives not identified and examined? The government's case is not helped by the fact that moving the Powerhouse Museum exhibits, and establishing a suitable building, is far more expensive than just about any option. See the list of submissions containing reasoned objections and alternatives that was presented to the Upper House Inquiry, page 3-4.