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Parramatta Powerhouse site flooded

By [Linda Morris](#)

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The site of the new Powerhouse Museum has been inundated with floodwaters from the swollen Parramatta River, underlining the vulnerability of the \$1 billion project to flood. The ground floor of the four-level car park and the grassy riverfront was partially submerged in an area where the museum is to stand.

[The inundated car park. Image taken 6.45pm Sunday evening.]

Nearby, on the western side of the Lennox Bridge, the inundation was so severe site buildings for a new high-rise were seen to be teetering close to the river in video footage taken by residents.

A spokeswoman for the Powerhouse said the new building would have withstood the flood event and all exhibits would have been safe. "The advice from our flood engineer is that the weekend's weather event did not reach the one-in-100 [year] flood level mark," the spokeswoman said. "All exhibition spaces in the museum have been designed to be above this level. Modern buildings are designed to withstand the elements – the new Powerhouse is no exception."

Parramatta City councillor Donna Davis said the flooding was not unexpected. "This is a site where frequent flooding is common and that will always experience the fastest flowing and deepest water," she said. "Why would you house items of international and cultural significance on a site that is at such a high risk of flooding?"

The Moreau Kusunoki and Genton-designed building provides for cavernous open areas under the building, effectively placing the galleries and its displays above any emergency flooding event.

The water level in Parramatta River in the CBD reached 5.51m at 4.36pm on Sunday, which is about 3.3m above the normal bank level.

The museum spokeswoman said flood mitigation was "a core consideration from the outset as the safety of the precious Powerhouse collection is paramount," she said.

[Before the flood.]

The 2016 Flood Study prepared for Johnstaff Projects found much of the site fell within one-in-20 and one-in-100-year flood levels and was also subject to localised flooding. The site was on an existing overland flood route from the river to Phillip Street at its rear, and warranted the diversion of an existing stormwater drain. It was recommended that the museum's ground floor be set above 7.5 metres with limited basement parking. The building had been designed to meet those specifications.

In a letter to the upper house inquiry into the museum's relocation from Ultimo to Parramatta, river hydrologist Dr John Macintosh said the decision to locate the museum on this site would result in visitors being exposed to "unacceptable flood hazard" and "potentially expose the collections to damage or destruction if the site was inundated with floodwaters".

He estimated inundation to be at a depth of four metres in the event of a maximum flood event with the velocity of swirling floodwaters posing particular problems to the public.

"Of course, water structures can be designed to exclude water to this depth, foundations can be sealed, watertight bulkheads can be installed, and a feasible business case may be put forward in justification," Dr Macintosh said in his letter.

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"However, despite the economics, there would remain a good chance that the works would fail on at least one occasion during their life, through human error, material failure, or occurrence of unexpected circumstances."

North Parramatta Residents Action Group president Suzette Meade said the flooding restricted the site's use.

"The architects are touting 70 per cent of the site will be left unbuilt on for public use with outdoor events space for exhibitions and entertainment," Ms Meade said.

"These will be dangerously unusable every time we get heavy rain."