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Sydney Morning Herald

Fresh inquiry into Powerhouse Museum

A fresh parliamentary inquiry has been launched into the Berejiklian government's \$1.5 billion plan to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta, as well as disparities in funding support for city and regional galleries and museums.

The future of the museum and its priceless collection will be scrutinised by the [same select upper house committee which urged last year that the museum's relocation to Parramatta be abandoned and western Sydney be given its own world-class institution.](#)

[Renders of the Parramatta Powerhouse, where 70 per cent of the site is public space to accommodate performing arts festivals and community events.]

The wide-ranging inquiry will investigate the vision behind the move, governance of the project, including the effectiveness and adequacy of planning, the business case, design briefs, project management, public reporting, costs and cultural and demographic justifications.

Greens MP David Shoebridge said special focus would be given to the consequences of floods [after the carpark on the riverfront site was on February 10 turned into a swimming pool during the one-in-a-10-year flood event.](#)

Terms of reference also include the heritage status of the site at Ultimo and Willow Grove and St George's Terrace, historic buildings at Parramatta slated for demolition per the winning designs by Moreau Kusunoki and Genton.

The motion to hold an inquiry was backed by Greens and Labor, and was carried on voices in the upper house without there being a vote.

"Our initial focus will be on the safety of the priceless collection especially given the recent flooding on the proposed Parramatta site," said Mr Shoebridge, who will act as the inquiry's deputy chairman.

"We will also be passing a close eye on the proposed budget given the endemic cost overruns that every significant infrastructure project has faced under this government.

[The inundated former David Jones car park on which the new Powerhouse Museum will stand.]

"There continues to be strong concerns from the Parramatta community about not just the design but the location and purpose of the Powerhouse Museum. My concern is that we are going to get a series of sub-standard sites and lose this grand institution that we all love."

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The inquiry comes as this masthead revealed plans were well advanced to turn the former NSW Land Titles building into a museum for the decorative arts managed by the Powerhouse Museum.

The idea for Sydney's answer to London's Victoria & Albert Museum was raised by former Sydney Lord Mayor Lucy Turnbull with the director of the Powerhouse Museum last year as part of a proposed revamp of the cultural precinct of Macquarie St East.

At the same time, controversy erupted this week over the scope of state heritage listing of the Powerhouse's Ultimo site.

After a long delay, [notice was given to list the Powerhouse Museum's engine house and turbine hall, second boiler house, office building and switch hall for heritage listing.](#)

Former museum trustee Kylie Winkworth said the state heritage nomination was highly selective, protecting only the "left-over bits of heritage sites that the state government doesn't need to demolish for its development ambitions".

In the assessment criteria the [nomination](#), she said, failed to mention the Powerhouse Museum, its Sulman award-winning Wran building, the tram depot for which the power station was built, the in situ gantry cranes and relics, and collection items directly related to the site and ignored its cultural significance as a major landmark of the 1988 Bicentenary.

The committee would comprise representatives from government and convene "as soon as practicable" before officially calling submissions, Mr Shoebridge said.

Arts Minister Don Harwin has been contacted for comment.