

P.O. Box 104  
Broadway NSW 2007  
23 March 2020

Heritage Council of NSW  
Locked Bag 5020  
Parramatta, NSW, 2124

**RE: Objection to the proposed listing on the State Heritage Register of the Ultimo Tramways Power House, 500 Harris St Ultimo**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to express my objection to the proposed listing of the Ultimo Tramways Power House on the State Heritage Register as it is currently formulated. I would also like to express my dissatisfaction with the flawed *Assessment of Heritage Significance, Ultimo Tramways Power House Museum, Independent Review* prepared for Heritage NSW by consultants Cracknell and Lonergan, on which the assessment is based.

The Cracknell and Lonergan review refers to an entity, “the Ultimo Tramways Power House Museum”, which never existed under that name and effectively denigrates the site’s function as a world-class and award-winning museum since 1988, in favour of a focus on the significance of the site’s original function as a power station.

The former Ultimo Power House provided power for the electrified Sydney tramway system and, from 1903, also enabled the electrification of crucial city infrastructure, as well as supplying bulk power to some Sydney suburbs and later to the State grid. However, while the State-level significance of the power station is without question, the suggested curtilage for inclusion on the State Heritage Register, as outlined in the review and adopted by Heritage NSW, does not even fully incorporate surviving features of the present Powerhouse Museum that are relevant to the heritage significance of the Ultimo Power House.

Based on the current proposal, the State heritage listing would apply only to the shell of the original Ultimo Power House, encompassing the Turbine Hall, Engine House, Boiler Hall, Switch House and Office Building. This ignores and leaves unprotected the rare and significant Case gantry cranes in the Engine House and the Goninans (Newcastle) gantry crane in the Turbine Hall, which were an integral and necessary part of the operation of the power station. The adjacent Ultimo Tram Depot (used to stable trams operating on the George Street system), which together with the power station forms an important industrial heritage precinct relating to the origins of electrified public transport in NSW, has equally been overlooked in the proposed curtilage for State Heritage listing and protection.

The relationship of the Tram Depot and the Power House as an integral industrial heritage precinct has already been recognised: when the two buildings were acknowledged to have Local Heritage status, the Tram Depot was not listed as a separate entity, because it was accepted as part of the curtilage of the Power House. Additionally, both the Power House and the Tram Depot are listed separately as significant entities on the Register of the National Estate and on the National Trust Register.

In addition to its failure to fully-protect the complete heritage precinct associated with the Ultimo Power House, the currently proposed listing ignores the award winning adaptive re-use of the derelict power station during the 1980s into the Powerhouse Museum – a sensitive repurposing of

the significant Power House precinct that saved it from destruction, while at the same time revitalising a state cultural institution that was itself in danger of becoming 'derelict'.

As the flagship venue of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Powerhouse Museum was the inheritor of a rich heritage of public education and collecting in the fields of science, technology and decorative arts extending back to the *Sydney International Exhibition* of 1879. The depth and breadth of this collection, and the incorporation of the new field of social history – recognising and preserving aspects of the domestic, everyday life and popular culture – created a vibrant new cultural and educational venue for Sydney, which has developed a strong social significance for the people of Sydney and the state.

From the opening of the first stage of the museum redevelopment, in the former Tram Depot in 1981, the Powerhouse rapidly became recognised as a place where adults and children could learn about, and engage with, science, technology, design and history. Generations of school children have fond memories of school excursions and school holiday visits to the museum. Sydney's multi-cultural communities have also been able to showcase and celebrate their cultural traditions at the museum, alongside those of mainstream Australia, as have sub-cultures from gamers to Star Wars fans. The Australian pro-space community is just one of many special interest groups with which the museum has forged close links over the past three decades, to their mutual benefit.

Yet this important social significance attached to the Powerhouse Museum is one of the many heritage values of the museum redevelopment of the Power House site that has been ignored, or deemed of little consequence to recommending that the Powerhouse Museum as a whole, rather than the shell of the original Power House, be considered for State Heritage significance. These special community connections will almost certainly be lost should the museum move to Parramatta.

The adaptive re-use of power stations as cultural institutions has been a global trend over the past few decades, with the development of the Tate Modern gallery from the former Bankside Power Station in London being perhaps the most recognised example internationally. The Powerhouse Museum has museological and architectural significance as an early example of this trend, combining onsite (within the former Tram Depot and Power House) all the major service departments of a modern museum, climate controlled storage for artefacts and archives, educational facilities and a versatile range of display spaces, within revitalised heritage buildings complemented by sympathetically designed modern additions.

The 1988 award of the prestigious Sulman Medal to the architect of the Powerhouse Museum recognised not only the new additions to the original building Galleria and Wran Building, but also the overall interior design of the museum, tying the old and new structures into a coherent whole. The museum's accessible design, also a forerunner in international museum design, additionally won the 1988 Australian Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled award.

An important aspect of the museum's conceptual design was restoring and adapting the Engine House and Boiler Hall to exhibit the museum's nationally significant steam power and transport collections. By presenting these collections within related architectural contexts, the interpretation of both the globally important history of the Industrial revolution and the role of the Power House as a crucial part of Sydney's industrial and public transport history, is enhanced and made more immediate for the visitor.

Given the importance of the Ultimo Power House's 'second life' as the Powerhouse Museum, to limit the State Heritage recognition of the site only to the shell of the original power station is to

acknowledge only part of the site's history, which is at odds with established principles of heritage practice. The repurposing of the Power House into the Powerhouse Museum is another chapter in the overall history of the building and any listing for State Heritage recognition should include the complete precinct of power station, modern buildings and tram depot to ensure their long term preservation and protection from Sydney's current climate of rampant commercial development.

I would note that I am a former curator at the Powerhouse (Space Technology), with more than thirty years' experience at the museum (1983-2014). I initiated and developed the museum's space technology collection – which is unique in Australia – and developed specialist experience in space exhibitions and outreach programs which has been sought by national and international museums, as well as by NASA. I am also a Lecturer in Space Humanities at the International Space University, based in Strasbourg, France, Co-Chair of the History of Astronautics Committee of the International Academy of Astronautics and a member of the Academy's Space Museums Committee – all roles built upon the experience I developed while working at the Powerhouse Museum.

In this year's Australia Day honours, I was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia specifically for my "services to astronautics as a curator". I have also been honoured with elected Membership in the International Academy of Astronautics. The expertise and historical research for which these honours were awarded has been a direct result of my work at the Powerhouse Museum. Many of my former colleagues have likewise been honoured with national and international awards by their peers, testifying to the respect in which the research conducted at the museum, built upon its collections and exhibitions, is held.

I am deeply concerned that the current proposal to list the 'Ultimo Tramways Power House' for State Heritage significance fails to recognise the total significance for which the Power House precinct should be listed. It neglects to provide for the protection of the complete site, including not only the original Power House, but also the Tram Depot, the Wran Building and Galleria and does not recognise the unique relationship of artefacts and architectural context provided by the in situ display of the steam power and transport collections in the Engine House and Boiler Hall.

I would therefore request the Committee to reject the current flawed submission for State Heritage listing of the 'Ultimo Tramways Power House', awaiting a future submission which will give due recognition and protection to the entire Power House/Tram Depot industrial heritage precinct, including recognition of the social and heritage significance of the Powerhouse Museum.

Yours Sincerely,

Kerrie Dougherty OAM, IAA