

Ultimo is final stop for early steam engine

POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

Linda Morris



Locomotive No.1 will stay put. Photo: Dallas Kilponen

The NSW government has officially abandoned plans to relocate the Boulton and Watt steam engine, the Locomotive No.1, and the Catalina flying boat to the new Parramatta Powerhouse.

Arts Minister Don Harwin confirmed the significant objects of the industrial age would remain at Ultimo following the government's decision to retain the

museum's inner Sydney site. The minister could not guarantee that the nearby Harwood building, the primary storage facility for the Powerhouse's priceless collection, would not be sold or redeveloped.

Locomotive No.1 hauled the first passenger train in NSW and was to have been a centrepiece exhibit of the new Parramatta Powerhouse. However, it had been the subject of rising concerns around the cost and logistics of its removal to the new purpose-built museum.

A feasibility study commissioned in March confirmed at least 15 of the museum's largest objects would not fit in the new building's goods lift and it had considered ways to lift the steam train, railway carriages, tram, helicopter and other objects into the riverside museum by way of cranes and a void between exhibition spaces.

Mr Harwin confirmed the flagship exhibits would remain at Ultimo on the first hearing day of an upper house inquiry into management of the Powerhouse Museum. The Berejiklian government announced earlier this month that Ultimo would be spared from sale for commercial and residential towers. It had been due to close next July.

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences will now operate museums at Ultimo and Parramatta with the latter to stand as the institution's flagship, specialising in science and technology including robotics and artificial intelligence. The CBD museum would retain a focus on the industrial age, the minister said.

No money has been allocated to renew the Ultimo site, which was estimated in a 2014 business case to have needed \$350 million, funded in part by the sale of the Harwood site for \$70 million.

A final business case, likely to be completed by the end of the year at the cost of \$5 million, would consider the costs of remodelling Ultimo Powerhouse and the future of the Harwood building.

Mr Harwin said there were no plans to sell the storage facility. "But obviously in terms of making sure that we get the best result for the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo you've got to look at all the options."

Options available to government include its commercial sale, demolition and/or adaption as a new 1500-seat lyric theatre.

Create NSW's deputy secretary of community engagement Kate Foy said parts of the Harwood Building were "problematic" for public access and storage. Its suitability would be considered as part of a master plan being developed by Create Infrastructure that would inform the business case.

Asked by chair Robert Borsak if she wanted to see high-rise buildings on any part of the Ultimo site, Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore said: "I don't personally, no".

The Parramatta Powerhouse would likely open in late 2024.