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ArtsHub

In the face of green bans and protests, Powerhouse Museum rethinks future

Plans for the sale of the Powerhouse Museum's Ultimo site back-flipped over the weekend, as protests escalated around its imminent closure and green bans were imposed on the new Parramatta site.



Powerhouse Museum Ultimo. Photo: ArtsHub.

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After six years of protest and various Parliamentary Inquiries since the idea was first introduced by the Baird Government in 2014, the dismantling of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, to accommodate a move west to Parramatta, took a dramatic turn around over the weekend.

The surprise announcement by NSW Treasurer Dominic Perrottet and a recently reappointed Minister for the Arts, Don Harwin, on Saturday, 4 July, was welcomed by the sector, especially the Powerhouse Museum Alliance – which has long advocated for the relocation decision to be reversed.

The Ultimo site was scheduled to close 30 June with a staggered shut down through to July 2021. Protests had escalated in the past week in the lead up to the imminent closure, while visitor numbers wanting a final visit swelled.

The new Powerhouse is slated to open in late 2024.

Gladys Berejiklian's government has said it will abandon plans to sell the Ultimo property, and will now use the Parramatta site as a secondary Powerhouse location.

Sale of the Ultimo site was expected to generate some \$195 million, which would offset some of the costs of the new museum.

In a formal statement over the weekend (4 July), Powerhouse CEO, Lisa Havilah and President of the Museum of Applied Arts and Science (MAAS) Trust, Professor Barney Glover AO said they welcomed the NSW Government's announcement that the Powerhouse Ultimo site would be retained, with the new Powerhouse Parramatta to also go ahead.

Havilah said: ‘Today’s announcement gives us the opportunity to continue the legacy of our historic site at Ultimo while building towards our new home of science and technology at Powerhouse Parramatta. It is a wonderful outcome for our institution.’

Glover added: ‘As a Trustee I welcome this major investment as it will give visitors to the Museum’s four sites unprecedented access to our extensive Collection, in particular at Powerhouse Parramatta which will become the jewel in the crown for our unique cultural institution.’

MAAS includes the properties at Ultimo, the Museums Discovery Centre at Castle Hill, Sydney Observatory and eventually Powerhouse Parramatta.

The relocation costs from the Ultimo site were to be significant, money that the Premier has announced will now be channelled into the renovation of the current site.

Perrottet said the museum at Ultimo would complement the new ‘future-focused Parramatta facility’ and provide a jobs boost to the arts community, reported [SMH](#).

Was the green ban a trigger?

The NSW branch of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has placed a green ban on the site of the proposed Powerhouse Parramatta on 30 June, adding industrial weight to the grassroots campaign to save two state heritage listed buildings.

‘If the Berejiklian government wants work on the museum to proceed they need to sit down with the local community, listen to what they say and come up with a plan that preserves these buildings,’ Darren Greenfield, the union’s NSW secretary told [Architecture Australia](#).

Only last week (30 June) – in the face of green bans, and when pressed on the topic – Berejiklian was steadfast that Powerhouse Parramatta would go ahead.

According to *The Australian*, Berejiklian's capitulation on the Ultimo site was part of an attempt ‘to quell a backbench revolt following Don Harwin’s resurrection as arts minister’.

The Premier, who has been acting in the position of Arts Minister for the last few months, has failed to step up to celebrate and support the value of the arts despite the troubles afflicting the sector.

Her abrupt about-face on the Powerhouse's Ultimo site suggests she remains out of touch with the sector, resorting to an 11th hour escape route with mounting pressure as her government more broadly supports building and development.

https://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/museums/gina-fairley/in-the-face-of-green-bans-and-protests-powerhouse-museum-rethinks-future-260679?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Royalties+still+confusing%2C+Powerhouse+backflip%2C+selling+your+art+online+plus+all+the+latest+jobs&utm_campaign=AHAU+Jobs%3A+Monday+6+July+2020+-+Paid+-+newsletter