

25 November, 2020

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Save the Powerhouse



SYDNEY LORD MAYOR STILL EVASIVE ON SUPPORT FOR THE HARWOOD BUILDING

Hi Everyone,

Traditionally the Powerhouse Museum was always one of the cultural highlights of the City of Sydney's LGA, and an anchor point on the "Cultural Ribbon" - a concept originally created by actor Cate Blanchett with husband Andrew Upton, to link all of Sydney's arts institutions, and - initially - strongly supported by the City. When Mike Baird's infamous "move" project was announced in 2015, Lord Mayor Clover Moore and her independent team volubly opposed it.

In late 2016, Councillor Jess Miller, representing Moore at a "Save" rally, asserted "...as a City we see this Ultimo (institution) as an integral part of our Cultural Ribbon..." <https://youtu.be/i4ldJVo7rUM>

But this policy was abruptly "ripped to shreds" a few days later, when the Council voted "to endorse a harbour walk that follows the foreshore from Darling Harbour to Woolloomooloo"

(See SMH of 19 Dec, 2016 <http://tiny.cc/5te5tz>)

A City spokesperson "explained" that "in Sydney the idea of a walk that unites all major institutions dispersed across the city just doesn't work", Instead, the Council had decided to create a series of walks that included not only major cultural institutions, but "also everything from...artist-run galleries and creative workspaces through to the major events and institutions that drive the visitor economy."

Cr Linda Scott condemned the resolution to excise the Powerhouse as "a setback for the fight to retain the museum at its present site in Ultimo...Moore, acting under pressure from the Liberal state government, shouldn't be deleting the Powerhouse Museum from the city's key cultural strategy" she said.

Even though the Council subsequently vowed that it had "not given up its efforts to stop the relocation of the Powerhouse to Parramatta", since then the Lord Mayor's support for keeping the Powerhouse, just as it is, in Ultimo, has been guarded, at best.

We wrote to her in September (<http://tiny.cc/hte5tz>) outlining our concerns about current strong rumours that the Harwood Building is to be destroyed, or converted to a lyric theatre (Arts Minister Harwin's preference) or cultural industries centre (the MASS CEO's choice). We pointed out that

- at the July 29 Parliamentary Inquiry hearing (see webcast recording <http://tiny.cc/9ue5tz> or transcript – p40/43 <http://tiny.cc/bue5tz>), she said "We (the City) have a great deal of interest in being involved in any decisions that are made about those (ie the buildings on the Ultimo) sites" but avoided specifically mentioning the essential Harwood Building, which was specially adapted by Architect Lionel Glendenning to store the Museum's valuable collection and house vital curatorial and maintenance facilities.

- the Harwood Buildings is, and has always been, essential to the functioning and character of the Powerhouse as an internationally-acclaimed museum, from both a "heritage" and an "operational" perspective.

Finally, we said "it is...felt that you have left your options open regarding the VITALLY important Harwood building" and asked her for "precise clarification of where you stand on its future and its continued use as the Museum's collection storage and curation centre.

In her carefully crafted response (received ten weeks later) <http://tiny.cc/jte5tz> she nimbly skirted around the question, reminding us that "the Heritage Council of NSW (has) concluded that the Harwood building is not of state heritage significance" but that "the City of Sydney will consider the significance of the Harwood building against the relevant criteria and whether it should be listed as a heritage item..." (WHEN?)

She concludes noncommittally "I am pleased that the NSW Government has now recognised that retaining the museum in Ultimo is the best cultural use. Keeping the Powerhouse Museum is an opportunity to rethink and renew it ... and for it to be more fully integrated into the (Government's?) planning of this important precinct." Whatever that really means, we clearly cannot rely on the Lord Mayor's/the City's/ unqualified support for keeping the entire Powerhouse, restored to its "former glory", in Ultimo.

Should we be surprised?