

14 February, 2021

Campaign to Save the Powerhouse

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Bulletin 59: Not the time to relax – or give up!

The Legislative Council Inquiry sits again today (Monday 15 February). The program for today can be found at <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/transcripts/2511/Hearing%20Schedule%20-%2015%20Feb%202021.pdf>

If you are interested in watching the proceedings the hearing will be webcast live:
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Pages/webcasts.aspx> beginning 9 .15 am.

The witness list is interesting: first is Minister Harwin with bureaucrats Kate Foy, of the Premiers Office and Simon Draper, CEO of Infrastructure NSW who was appointed after the previous Inquiry. At 11 am we have Ms Havilah and Peter Collins, the new President of the MAAS trustees. At 12 00 we have Mr Christopher Brown, see below. After lunch, 1 30 pm CFMEU rep Darren Greenfield is 'on' and at 2 15 expert flood consultant Steven Molino will give evidence.

I am getting a chance to put our point of view at 3.15. Please try to join the webcast by using <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Pages/webcasts.aspx> . It would be embarrassing if Mr Brown had a bigger audience!

The day concludes with the evidence of Councillor Donna Davis of Parramatta 4 to 4.45.

A general summary

There are two aspects of the ongoing struggle. One is to ensure that PHM remains the key site for the museum, fully equipped with a functioning workshop in the Harwood building and the second is to get for Parramatta the facilities they want on the site that they want, and not just have the current monstrosity plonked upon them. We go flat out on both projects, separately, in the process supporting anything positive that comes out of PHM and giving it all the support we can.

And there are some positives. A program of new displays is being issued: you probably have seen reports in the media. They are locally created, largely by museum staff, who of recent years have often taken second place to imported programs of varying quality. Four years ago we were faced with the Government's intention to bulldoze the whole area and put up high rise, but now we are told that the existing buildings will be retained. Covid has wreaked havoc on the normal operations of the museum, but gradually things are improving. The volunteer supervisors have developed a good program of online interaction with the volunteers and this may assist the planned updating of the signage and information material in the museum, which has now been delayed for many years.

For the tragics:

1: notes on a new 'popular' support group for the 'move'.

Christopher Brown, who incidentally lives in Birchgrove, is the convenor of a new group, which, would you believe, has the rather cheeky title of the Western Sydney Powerhouse Museum Alliance. As you know the real Powerhouse Museum Alliance has been functioning since very early in the struggle, and its massive website has chronicled every event, clearly demonstrating the overwhelming opposition to the 'move'. Mr Brown claims to have the support of the Catholic

Education Diocese of Parramatta, the Committee for Sydney, the Greater Western Sydney Giants, Parramatta Eels, the Sydney Festival, the Westmead Institute for Medical Research, the Westmead Institute for Medical Research Foundation, the University of Sydney, the Western Sydney University and the Western Sydney Wanderers. We feel that this degree of support is as illusory as the 2015 claim that 500,000 Parramatta people were clamouring for the 'move' to take place, and are checking on resolutions of the Sydney University Senate etc. It all takes time, but our every instinct is that this is yet another attempt to demonstrate support for the 'move' when indeed there is a distinct lack of enthusiasm. Informed support for the project is hard to find: remember that when Mr Baird was asked at the last Inquiry to name one Western Sydney arts or cultural group who supported the 'move' he did not do so even when given three weeks to research this simple fact.

Mr Brown is the 'Chair' of The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, a developer-oriented lobby group with about ten paid employees, based in Rozelle. They entered the debate in May 2020, with enthusiastic support for the museum 'move' and I called on them with some of our fact sheets and invited them to dialogue. No response! He is closely allied with Mr Borger's Western Sydney Business Chamber, another lobby group, part of a wider organisation whose registered business office is in North Sydney, consisting of many business / development lobby groups throughout the state. We have also invited him to debate: we are certain that the business aspects of the 'move' are an unmitigated disaster, and we have suggestions that will achieve far better results both financially and culturally. Again, no response, not even to a registered letter.

2: Release of information

You may remember that the last two bulletins have described the reluctance of the Government to abide by the spirit of the latest call for release of documents. We sent a registered letter to the Premier's office on 21 December, and emailed it to other Government groups. This letter detailed the lack of information in the released documents and made a request for them to be put online, particularly because of the severe restrictions on their access that had been imposed by Covid considerations. We got the standard reply from INSW, (what a great project the 'move' is!), and also a letter from one Kate Boyd, General Counsel for the Premier's Department referring me to <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bills/Pages/bill-details.aspx?pk=3795> . I have checked all the associated pages and cannot find anything that could possibly be relevant. Yet another case of the Government's policy of disinformation and no information. It is getting very tiresome.

But things are coming to a climax, and this is no time to give up. Thanks, everyone, for the support: and please try to listen to the hearing today.

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Australia's major museum of arts and sciences in Sydney's most evocative heritage building. For more information

<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/> See

also: <http://maasbusinesscase.com/> <http://lockoweb.com/phm/>

Facebook pages: <https://www.facebook.com/savethepowerhouse/>

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