

23 March, 2021
The Daily Telegraph

Museum to create 'great city' in west

LACHLAN LEEMING



Serhan Sadiq Gandhi, 4, and Ariana Bousimon, 5, playing with robots, at the Parramatta Powerhouse Community Space. Picture: Justin Lloyd



NOT just a tourist drawcard and a cultural landmark, the new Parramatta Powerhouse Museum has the potential to change history, no less.

Despite opposition to moving the museum from inner-city Ultimo, the state government last month finally received approval to deliver the new facility to the west.

And Premier Gladys Berejiklian was buoyed by its prospects, saying it can "change the course of history".

And, while detractors continue to argue over its design and location, politicians and thought-leaders of the west have heaped praise upon the project they say will help Parramatta's transformation into a "great city".

Arts Minister Don Harwin said he had "absolutely no doubt" the largest investment in NSW arts and culture since the Sydney Opera House would revolutionise the west's cultural offering.

"Most people don't have an appreciation of the impact it'll have,"

Mr Harwin said. "It will be NSW's largest museum and I think it could be the largest in Australia."

According to the Arts Minister, the new facility will put Parramatta on level pegging with capital cities across Australia. "Most people don't even realise this – the centre of Parramatta as a city in its own right is already larger than Hobart, Darwin and Canberra," he said.

"It's incredibly important it not just be this place where there are offices and apartments – it needs to have arts and culture, and this museum is going to be the flagship for that."

His vision was backed by Ms Berejiklian, who told the Telegraph the new museum would "inspire generations of young people".

"Why shouldn't Western Sydney be home to one of the most significant cultural institutions of our time?" she said.

"It will inspire generations of young people to study science and technology and make breakthrough discoveries which can change the course of history."

It's the latest boon for a hyper-charged Parramatta, which has already seen billions of dollars of investment pumped into light rail and Metro Rail projects, while the spark of the \$3.2bn Parramatta Square urban renewal plan will see the face of Sydney's second CBD take shape.

Powerhouse Museum chief executive Lisa Havilah similarly agrees the museum will have a "generational impact" on Western Sydney, as well as wider New South Wales.

That commitment was underlined, she said, by an onsite academy and accommodation tailored for school trips from regional areas, with up to 10,000 kids from the bush expected to pass through the site each year.

In her view, the Powerhouse has the potential to be the “cultural anchor” for the west, which will help usher in new installations across the region.

“For Western Sydney it’s really important that arts and culture are embedded in that urban growth,” she said.

Chris Brown, founding chair of think-tank the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, said the museum would usher in a new level of aspiration.

“Great cities need great buildings,” Mr Brown said.

“It’s a statement to the kids in Western Sydney whose parents and grandparents have been paying taxes for Sydney’s cultural institutions for decades. Now they’ve got one among them.”

He outlined a vision for the world’s “biggest and best” Indigenous art gallery making a home in Parramatta.