

19/20 March 2022

## Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo: On-line Survey Questionnaire and Live Consultations

### 1.0 Questions asked in the On-line Survey

### 2.0 Answers (copied or recalled) to aspects of the Survey

### 3.0 Comments about the Consultation sessions

#### Introduction and background:

In early March 2022, the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences (MAAS) announced a free 'Powerhouse Ultimo Open Weekend' on 19/20 March, which included Live Consultation sessions about the future of the Ultimo museum site on Saturday 19 at 11 am, 1 pm and 3 pm and on Sunday 20 March at 1 pm and 3 pm. It also gave access to an on-line Survey questionnaire.

Despite many years of lobbying to keep the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo, and an announcement in 2020 that it was 'saved', Powerhouse Museum Alliance noted that 'the ensuing planning is a managed process working towards the outcome firmly stated by current Chair Peter Collins and current CEO Lisa Havilah at the Upper House Inquiry on 17 March 2022. That is: split the Museum – science and technology to Powerhouse Parramatta (with NO permanent exhibitions) and a creative precinct at Powerhouse Ultimo with focus on fashion and design. Neither facility is now called a museum. The collection, curators and all collection staff will be at Castle Hill. There is no curator of transport, social history, engineering or technology and only 5.2 conservators; there were 17 conservators in 2019. The packing up and move of the collection to Castle Hill is not being overseen by conservators.'

Many people responded to the On-line Survey, and attended the Consultation Sessions, which were chaired by Kylie Cochrane, Communication and Stakeholder Engagement technical lead partner for engineering and infrastructure advisory firm Aurecon, and included Alan Croker, Heritage architect and director of Design 5 architects and Thomas Klobucar, Project Director at Create NSW.

They noted that: 'Powerhouse Ultimo is going through a historic period of Renewal. As part of this process, a Conservation Management Plan is being prepared to help guide the future design, use and management of the museum. We invite you to be part of this process.' And in line with questions on the on-line Survey, saying 'We want to understand what you value most about the museum', questions included: What works well at Powerhouse Ultimo; What doesn't work at Powerhouse Ultimo; What are the opportunities for change/improvement/efficiencies?'

Questions and comments were encouraged from all in the audience, and it was noted that the comments would be documented (without names) for future reference.

From observations at the time, and reports (below) later sent in to the Powerhouse Museum Alliance by many professional people who have had long connections with the Museum, it was clear that, as well as a desire to maintain the **heritage aspects of the buildings**, including the 1988 award-winning additions and the early tram-shed Harwood Building, alongside the Power Station buildings, a great audience emphasis was placed on the significance of representing the **broad collection** across Science and Technology, Decorative Arts and Design and Social History – on this site – which should continue to be identified as the Powerhouse **Museum**, in Ultimo, not just Powerhouse Ultimo! Concern was expressed about the possible relocation of significant large machines and aeroplanes, the removal of the full collection to Castle Hill which is poorly accessible for museum staff and audiences, and the tendency to replace exhibition spaces and museum workshops with artist residencies and other temporary projects that are not necessarily focussed on the stories

behind objects in the collection. Also at issue was the expressed need to change the current 'Fashion and Design' identity to something more inclusive of all the collection. However, it was disconcerting to be advised by the organisers, that their task was to do with the buildings in Ultimo, and not the collection.

**See Below:**

Responses and comments sent independently to the Powerhouse Museum Alliance; names have been withheld.

If readers would like to add further comments and responses, email them to the Powerhouse Museum Alliance [info@powerhousemuseumalliance.com](mailto:info@powerhousemuseumalliance.com) and they will be included here.

## 1.0 Questions asked in the On-line Survey:

**On-line Survey here:** at <https://swipengage.com/#/powerhouse-ultimo-cmp> or [swipEngage](#)

***What do you value about Powerhouse Ultimo?*** (multiple choice)

- Exhibitions●
- Building architecture●
- History of the building●
- Events●
- Collection●
- Other (please specify)●

***How important is Powerhouse Ultimo to you?***

- Very important●
- Important●
- Neutral●
- Not very important●
- Not important●

***Are there any features/buildings/spaces within Powerhouse Ultimo that hold special meaning for you?***

- Yes (please specify)●
- No●

***Do you think that Powerhouse Ultimo is easy to find?*** ✓ ✗

***Do you think it is easy to access/enter Powerhouse Ultimo?***

***What makes it difficult to navigate Powerhouse Ultimo and its spaces?*** (multiple choice)

- Guides●
- Building layout●
- Organisation of exhibitions●
- Arrows and directions●
- Other (please specify)●

***What works well at Powerhouse Ultimo?***(multiple choice)

- Customer service●
- Exhibitions●
- Maintenance and renovation●
- Conservation of heritage●
- Events●
- Guides and navigation●
- Amenities (café, gift shop, toilets)●
- Other (please specify)●

***What helps you navigate Powerhouse Ultimo and it's spaces?*** (multiple choice)

- Arrows and directions●
- Building layout●

Guides/volunteers●

Organisation of exhibitions●

Other (please specify)●

***What requires improvement at Powerhouse Ultimo? (multiple choice)***

Customer service●

Exhibitions●

Maintenance and renovation●

Conservation of heritage●

Events●

Guides and navigation●

Amenities (café, gift shop, toilets)●

Other (please specify)●

***Where did you hear about this survey? (multiple choice)***

Social media●

Newspaper●

Powerhouse Ultimo website●

Radio●

Flyer●

Word-of-mouth●

Other (please specify)●

***How often do you visit Powerhouse Ultimo?***

Never visited●

Visited once or twice in my lifetime●

Every few years●

Once or twice a year●

Several times a year●

At least once a month●

***Which age group best represents you?***

Under 12 years old●

13-18 years old●

19-25 years old●

26-30 years old●

31-50 years old●

51-70 years old●

71 years or older●

***Please provide the postcode in which you live.***

***Do you have any further comments or questions?***

## **2.0 Answers (copied or recalled) to aspects of the Questionnaire**

**2.01: Prompts from Powerhouse Museum Alliance, shared beforehand with supporters:**

**The NSW Government is still trying to demolish our much-loved Powerhouse Museum. Tell the Government what you think of 'Powerhouse Ultimo' and their plans to evict the collections, drop the 'museum' word from the Powerhouse name, and shrink the PHM down to fashion and design displays, shops and subsidised artists' studios at a ridiculous cost of \$500m.**

The Government promised museum renewal but this is a museum heist to downsize the PHM and turn it into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct. **The community has been given no chance to have their say on keeping the Real Powerhouse Museum.** We urge everyone who cares about the future of the Powerhouse Museum to do the survey and consider some of the responses

we have listed below. **Don't fall for their push polling. If you want the Real Powerhouse Museum back tell them what you think.** And use our prompts below if you're stumped for answers. Please answer the online survey, open until midnight Sunday 20 March [online survey](#)

**What do you value about Powerhouse Ultimo?** Some possible answers...

- It's one of this country's great museums spanning everyday life, industry, trade, applied arts, making things and discovering how things work
- I value the Powerhouse Museum because it's the people's museum, showing the objects of working life and industrial history in a building and precinct about power, industry and transport
- Seeing the museum's extraordinary collection treasures
- Taking my kids to see the transport exhibition
- The interactives and experimentations
- Seeing the working steam engines
- Exhibitions and activities for families and children
- Having the collection accessible on site
- The social history exhibitions
- Learning about how things work
- The grand spaces of the Wran building, and the turbine and boiler halls
- The trains, planes and space collections in the transport exhibition

**Are there any features/buildings/spaces within Powerhouse Ultimo that hold special meaning for you? A Yes.** Some possible answers...

- The original grand museum entry via the Wran building with its curved cloud-painted ceiling, so spacious, light and welcoming
- The Galleria with No 1 loco and carriages, the Boulton and Watt beam engine, and the Strasburg clock
- The engine house with the Steam Revolution exhibition with working steam engines
- The majestic Transport, Flight and Space exhibition with trains, trams, cars, suspended planes, space and activities for kids
- The feeling of grand spaces and looking down through the museum
- Our kids liked the original carpet and the long ramp
- The complete Powerhouse Museum with the power house, tram depot and feeling of uncluttered space and sky as you walk along the Goods Line
- The whole museum is important to our family and it doesn't need a \$500m design competition or a new entry

**Do you think the Powerhouse Ultimo (sic) is easy to find? A Yes**

**Do you think it is easy to access/enter Powerhouse Ultimo? A Yes**

**What makes it difficult to navigate the Powerhouse Ultimo? Other please specify? A**

- Previous ill-conceived alterations to the museum's entry, layout, lifts and circulation
- The whole navigation thing is exaggerated. I get lost in every great museum.
- The ad hoc location of exhibitions that are not related or thematically grouped

**What works well at Powerhouse Ultimo? Other please specify...some possible answers**

- Visiting a remarkable heritage building with its modern entry and foyer and exhibitions for everyone
- A museum that once offered all kinds of exhibitions from historic steam engines to experimentations to lace and jewellery – something for everyone
- When the museum used to have lots of activities for kids
- Visiting a proper museum with collections

**What helps you navigate Powerhouse Ultimo and its spaces? Other please specify**

- I enjoy exploring the spaces and discovering new displays

- I liked the original groupings of exhibitions into different zones and spaces
- I like to ask a guide if I'm looking for something particular
- For me a museum is about discovery and surprise not road maps

**What requires improvement at Powerhouse Ultimo? Other please specify** – see our hints

- Plenty. Start by labelling the exhibitions properly.
- More exhibitions and activities for kids and families
- Bring back the social history exhibitions
- Restore the museum's exhibitions and design standards
- Restore the museum's original entry from Harris St, the glass lift and circulation paths
- More access to the museum's collections and library in the Harwood building
- Improving education programs and activities - hire more education staff
- Bring the collections back – the place is half empty
- Use the museum's proper name - it's the Powerhouse Museum, always was and will be
- Employing senior managers who know about museums and history

**Do you have any further comments or questions? Some possible responses**

- I don't agree with the Powerhouse Museum being turned into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct
- Save the real Powerhouse Museum
- It's the **Powerhouse Museum**, use its proper name
- The museum should be focussed on showing its collections and education, not offering subsidised studio spaces for artists
- The transport, technology and steam exhibitions are central to the history and meaning of the Powerhouse Museum, they must stay
- Reinstate the museum's original entry from Harris St into the Wran building
- Don't waste our money on unnecessary building projects. The government promised the Powerhouse Museum was saved. They must keep that promise.
- Our family says no to **Powerhouse Ultimo**. We want the real Powerhouse Museum back with its collections, great exhibitions and activities.
- The Powerhouse Museum is a much loved family museum with exhibitions that appeal to everyone. **That is what must be renewed.**
- Why wreck a great museum that is only 33 years old? Just bring back the Powerhouse Museum's collections and exhibitions designed for families.

**Responses:**

**2.02**

***What do you value about Powerhouse Ultimo?***

The Powerhouse Museum is part of the cultural and family memory of generations of visitors from Sydney, NSW and beyond. It truly is powered by the people. That is why it was saved from closure in 2020. It is the only museum in Sydney that represents industry and working life, and the experience of ordinary people, seen through transformative technologies, science, history and the objects of everyday life. Of special note is the remarkable design, heritage and conceptual synergy between the exhibition of the power and transport collections in the majestic volumes of the former power station.

***Are there any features/buildings/spaces within Powerhouse Ultimo that hold special meaning for you? A Yes.***

The memorable experience of entering the grand space of Wran building when it was the museum's entry. We felt welcome and important. And then the discovery of No 1 Loco, and the Boulton and Watt in operation in the galleria. Unforgettable.

***What makes it difficult to navigate the Powerhouse Ultimo? Other, please specify***

Unsympathetic alterations in recent years. And the exhibitions are no longer grouped by theme so there's no logic to the layout. Small pots are now in the biggest space which makes no sense. But I get lost in all great museums. It's not a problem.

***What works well at Powerhouse Ultimo? Other, please specify...***

People go to the Powerhouse to see amazing collections and learn new things. And be inspired by the wonderful spaces that unfold as you move through the building. Our kids love the steam engines working and the transport gallery.

***What helps you navigate Powerhouse Ultimo and its spaces? Other, please specify***

If I'm looking for something I ask a guide. I like these interactions. A museum is about discovery and finding new things as you explore the spaces. Way finding and navigation isn't what makes a great museum experience. I like to stop and be surprised.

***What requires improvement at Powerhouse Ultimo? Other, please specify***

The exhibition labelling is very poor. People go to museums to learn. There should be more history exhibitions. And we want to see more collections and exhibitions, the place feels half empty. I'd like to see the collections accessible in the Harwood building. New senior management, more curators and conservators, giving us back the real Powerhouse Museum, getting the artists and creatives out of the building, putting the collections back...

***Do you have any further comments or questions?***

I disagree with turning the Powerhouse Museum into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct. That is not what the Museum is about. It has always been a family museum with a strong commitment to education, learning by doing and discovering how things work. The museum's appeal is the breadth of its collections and exhibitions across science, technology, transport, history, engineering, design and decorative arts. The museum's mission and focus should be on showing its collections, education, and audience engagement, not artist studios, fashion and creative industries. The PHM must retain its name as the Powerhouse Museum and its special relationship between the industrial heritage of its buildings and precinct, and its underpinning narrative of the industrial revolution in a global, national and local context. There is only one Powerhouse Museum. Its history, mission and identity is indivisible from its home in a purpose designed museum in a former power station. That is what must be respected, restored and preserved in the renewal project. It shows a want of imagination, confidence and vision that you've appropriated the Powerhouse name for Parramatta when it should have its own unique name, brand, concept and identity that reflects its place, purpose, concept and building, just as the PHM in Ultimo does.

**2.03:**

***What do you value about the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo?***

The fact that the Powerhouse is a Museum - one of the 3 major NSW cultural institutions: the Powerhouse Museum (MAAS), the Australian Museum, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. I reject completely the 'communications directive' to drop the name Museum from the Museum's title - which is Powerhouse Museum.

I value all of the categories above: Exhibitions; Building Architecture; History of the Building; Events; Collection and more - the Museum's Research and Scholarship; Publications; Professional Museological standards; Innovation in the way it fulfills its Purpose; the Museum's record of engagement with diverse audiences over generations; and its international, national and state leadership and influence.

Above all, I value the Powerhouse Museum as one of the foundational cultural of NSW, indeed Australia. I am appalled at the ignorant and destructive steps which have been instigated by those with no knowledge and no understanding of the Powerhouse Museum and its place in the State's and Nation's history. Nor do they have any grasp of the Museum's international connections,

beginning with its founding based on the South Kensington model - Albertopolis - of the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Science Museum, London.

Most egregiously, they have no understanding nor awareness of the Museum's place in contemporary culture and its deep connections to people from across NSW. The shallowness and mindless destructiveness demonstrated by the proponents of the various schemes to sequester the Museum's recurrent budget, resources, facilities and collection for ephemeral and vague outcomes, quite unrelated to the purpose of the Powerhouse Museum has been mindboggling. Those who have hatched and persisted with this ridiculous Baird thought bubble - despite the numerous illogicalities, impossibilities, insupportable risks, outrageous costs and outright lies have shown themselves to be deeply uncultured, unpatriotic, unimaginative, divorced from reality and self-serving.

***How important to you is the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo?***

A: Very important

***Are there any features/buildings/spaces within Powerhouse Museum Ultimo that hold special meaning for you?***

A: Yes: The entire Powerhouse Museum complex from the Harwood Building - former Ultimo Tram Depot, on Mary Ann Street through to William Henry Street, inclusive of the remnant original Boiler House, the 1899 Ultimo Power House and all the 1988 buildings, interiors and exhibitions which together form the award winning Powerhouse Museum and, including the Ultimo Post Office: the complete Powerhouse Museum holds very special meaning, especially as it is sited in the Museum's historic Ultimo cultural and educational precinct.

The glorious volumes of the Wran building, the Galleria, the Turbine Hall, the Boiler Hall and the more focused spaces of the Switch House, are powerful and evocative contexts to display the Museum's outstanding collection, perfectly suited to the seamless combination of industrial heritage and contemporary architecture. The distinctive roof lines of the Harwood Building define its historical role as the Ultimo Tram Depot which is the perfectly located and very practical housing for the Museum's publicly accessible operational and collection focused 'engine room' of the Museum.

***Do you think the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo is easy to find?*** A: Yes

***Do you think it is easy to access/enter Powerhouse Museum Ultimo?*** A: Yes

***What makes it difficult to navigate the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo and its spaces?***

The only confusion in *currently* moving around the museum is caused by the *current* ad hoc location of displays – hardly fully fledged exhibitions – there is no organisation of exhibitions relevant to the spaces - small scale displays in grand spaces - ie. 400 pots with no theme labels, graphics, few interactives, audio visuals. Such a lost opportunity to engage visitors who are unfamiliar with Australia's studio ceramics. Should have been presented as a classic Powerhouse Museum exhibition in a Switch House Gallery.

Get rid of the clumsy and pathetic interventions (clunky lift in Turbine Hall etc) from the Casey period and reinstate the signature Glass lift in the Galleria, the grand entry into the Wran building , the waterfall of escalators, the clear ramp spine etc and better link with a lower courtyard entry exit. Notwithstanding this ad hocery, the grand sequence of spaces is easy to navigate and the sequence of discovery is always exciting with vistas opening up and views giving unusual angles for understanding the historic and contemporary buildings, architecture and major landmark objects. There is a wonderful opening out to visitors as they discover the museum, of vistas and experiences - from mega to intimate, that are quite distinctive and unique to the experience of the Powerhouse Museum. This defining museum experience should be reinstated.

***What works well at the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo?***

This is an unclear question as so many signature exhibitions have been removed and the replacement displays have little engagement with core audiences and, have poor design and interpretation

standards. The current 'maintenance and renovation' is misguided if the recent removal of the carpets (rather than replacement with like for like) and the introduction of 'polished concrete floors' is any indication – the current ad hoc approach - especially as the Conservation Management Plan with the Statement of Significance for the Powerhouse Museum is still in preparation and has had no public discussion. The vistas and sequence of unique spaces from the moment of entering into the Wran building (original entry) then through the Galleria into the levels of the Turbine and Boiler and Switch House using the ramp and escalators - the original glass lift should be reinstated and the TH intrusive lift removed.

***What requires improvement at Powerhouse Museum Ultimo?***

The current range of exhibitions fall well short of the Powerhouse Museum standard of exhibitions distinguished by labelling, graphics, audiovisuals, interactives, lighting, sound as appropriate etc and the safe and secure display of the collection.

There appears to be no understanding of the Museum's core audiences as evidenced by the lack of exhibitions designed to have a wider appeal.

Get rid of the black spaces with poor lighting and the intrusive use of unsympathetic display components like bricks. Current exhibition design is of a poor standard. The insertion of artist commissions is confusing, esoteric, often distracting and at odds with the Museum's remit - applied arts and applied sciences - NOT contemporary art.

***Where did you hear about this survey?***

A: Social media, Newspapers

***How often do you visit the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo?*** Several times a year.

***Do you have further comments or questions?***

I am completely against the Powerhouse Museum being turned into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct. Such a move is a degradation of the Museum's purpose and role and a slap in the face to the people of New South Wales who have endowed and supported this Museum over generations.

The major exhibition themes and groupings from the 1988 opening should be reinstated, renewed and invigorated according to best museum practice NOT ephemeral, opaque, contemporary art installations.

The Powerhouse Museum is a museum for generations - this wide appeal and the educational power of the Museum must be invigorated and nourished.

The Powerhouse Museum is a world renowned museum which led the way in repurposing our industrial heritage with contemporary architecture and high design standards in every facet of its presence and operations. The last seven years of mismanagement, expensive and destructive changes, and currently in progress, the evisceration of its best practice on-site collection management and museum operation facility that is the Harwood Building must all be stopped. A program of restoration, renewal and re engagement with the People of NSW and beyond as a leading MUSEUM must be funded and undertaken by museum professionals. This destruction of our Museum must stop.

***2.04: What requires improvement at Powerhouse Museum Ultimo?***

What most requires improvement is the lack of coherence about what the Powerhouse MUSEUM is about now and how that relates to the Government's vague notions for its future. Using 'fashion and design' as a buzz phrase, reveals among other things a lack of understanding of the place of design in relation to the Museum's entire collection. A good first step would be to have a draft Conservation Management Plan to comment on, given this survey seeks input into it. This would help to respond to the pre-determined theme of Fashion and Design, which appears to have been concocted in a vacuum. Clearly this is cart before the horse and constrains any blue sky thinking about how the

Museum at Ultimo should be reimagined. It also casts doubt on how seriously any contrary opinions will be received or considered.

**2.05: Do you have further comments or questions?**

I am deeply concerned at the apparent intention to focus the Ultimo Powerhouse in the areas of fashion and design, as a so-called creative precinct. The Powerhouse has always represented a unique combination of science, technology, decorative arts, design and social history, with a focus on exhibitions assembled around artefacts based on its collecting themes. I have always described it to friends overseas as the "Smithsonian museums rolled into one", as a way of describing the breadth and depth of the Powerhouse's collections and exhibition. To reduce the Ultimo Powerhouse to a narrowly focussed venue is to decrease its unique characteristics and significantly reduce its visitor appeal. Dismembering the comprehensive thematic coverage and collection presentation that has existed at Ultimo under the MAAS for 100 years, in order to spread it across three venues (I'm including the Castle Hill facility in this) - two of which are much less accessible than Ultimo - does the museum as a whole a serious disservice and reduces its cultural and educational value to the people of NSW. There are other creative precincts in Sydney, such as the Carriageworks at Redfern, and it should not be necessary to support the creative community at the expense of the presentation of the material cultural heritage of the state in a unique and easily accessible venue.

**2.06:**

***What do I value about Powerhouse Ultimo?***

I deeply value Sydney's Powerhouse MUSEUM. Its name (a valuable, internationally-recognised site and brand) should not be devalued to the bland and meaningless (at least to visitors from interstate and overseas) Powerhouse Ultimo.

***Spaces and features with special meaning?***

1. Wran Building, designed to fit the Boulton & Watt engine, Number 1 Loco plus grand entry and large exhibitions. Steam/Energy exhibition in the original Engine Room. Impressive Boiler Hall. US and NSW-made cranes over the Engine Room and Turbine Hall.
2. Original features of the power station. Internationally important steam engines and transport objects.

***What makes it difficult to navigate?***

Lack of orientation experience, signage and arrows. Poor promotion, so visitors don't know what to look for. Paucity of objects, images and labels that could draw people through daunting spaces.

***What works well?***

Working exhibits (steam engines and musical instruments). Educational tables staffed by enthusiastic volunteers.

***What helps you navigate?***

My memory of how the spaces used to work together and how inspiring the view over the Transport exhibition was before it was trashed. The main lift and escalators work well to link floors.

***What requires improvement?***

1. Signal content by displaying objects behind Harris St windows. Multilingual welcome signs and apps. Collection objects in the foyer, with interesting questions and stories and video of conservation work. Much more content for families and schools.
2. There should be more exhibitions of interest to families and school groups. A new entry experience is required, with objects, prompts, labels, video and orientation to what the museum offers.

***Further comments***

1. The plan to emphasise 'fashion and design' would result in a much less interesting and vital museum. Fashion, with its ephemeral froth and bubble, does not tell us much about the world and represents only a fraction of the dress collection, which is a fraction of the textile collection, which is a fraction of the design collection. The MAAS collection is amazing in its breadth and depth, as well as in the ideas and stories it represents, and the many synergies between technology and design would be lost by splitting the long-standing aims of MAAS between its two main venues. It's time to get serious, employ more conservators to care for this very diverse collection (which requires diverse skills to maintain all objects) and more curators to develop wonderful, thoughtful exhibitions. At least one new exhibition, with changing content, should address Australian ideas, innovations and designs that have changed the world. The mooted proposal to remove and re-install large objects indicates a woeful lack of understanding of the challenges and risks involved. The steam engines should be retained while replacing smaller objects and refocusing the exhibition on the wider subject of Energy (the most important challenge of our era).

2. Much is made of plans for a 'creative precinct' that has little to do with the museum's collection and the museum's responsibility to interpret that collection for the people of NSW and for visitors from around the world. The Powerhouse Museum was always the site of much creative activity, and 'human creativity' was the over-riding theme of the 25 exhibitions opened in 1988, when the museum won awards for architecture and disabled access and when it led the world in interactive engagement of visitors. Those exhibitions, and the many developed in-house over following years, involved a good deal of creativity on the part of a talented staff of curators, exhibition designers, graphic designers, interactive designers, model-makers, preparators, educators, conservators, photographers and film-makers. Most exhibitions received from other institutions had an added component developed in-house and displaying Powerhouse objects. Curators also continued to improve the documentation of existing objects and to acquire new objects, which required them to ask creative questions of the objects and associated documents, and of designers, makers and innovators. This work led not just to exhibitions but also to scholarly articles, books for general readers, talks and tours, a world-leading highly informative online public access collection catalogue, blog posts, major online projects addressing particular themes, and content developed to support school curricula. This is where the major creative effort is still required.

#### **2.07:**

##### ***What do I value about Powerhouse Ultimo?***

I treasure the Museum's extensive collection and what these collections mean to visitors and researchers locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. I value the State of NSW's C19th and C20th vision for the inner-city Ultimo industrial and educational precinct, including the original (Harris Street) and new (Powerhouse Museum) museum buildings. The Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo is a Museum of design and industry (applied arts), applied sciences and technology. It is not and never was an Arts Centre per se. It, the existing Powerhouse Museum, like all national institutions, needs significant ongoing maintenance and support from the Government as it is a highly-valued and much-cherished cultural institution. It's not too late to revive and continue to enhance the Museum's former status as an internationally respected Museum.

#### **2.08:**

##### ***What do I value about Powerhouse Ultimo?***

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##### ***Spaces and features with special meaning?***

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***What requires improvement?***

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2. There should be more exhibitions of interest to families and school groups. A new entry experience is required, with objects, prompts, labels, video and orientation to what the museum offers.

***Further comments***

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readers, talks and tours, a world-leading highly informative online public access collection catalogue, blog posts, major online projects addressing particular themes, and content developed to support school curricula. This is where the major creative effort is still required.

### **3.0: Comments about the Consultation sessions**

#### **3.1:**

In the 1.00 Sunday session that I attended there were about 21 people. Perrottet had promised on 4 July 2020 that the Powerhouse Museum would continue to display science, technology, engineering *and* design. That is a promise he needs to keep.

A lot of teachers were in the audience and there was much discussion of the education value of the museum's exhibitions, especially for science. I noticed that where the survey questionnaire asked what requires improvement in the Powerhouse there was no option for better education programs. A few commented on how great the space exhibition is, but it needs to be updated with new exhibits and material. One physics teacher said she didn't know the museum had a space exhibition and she'd like to bring her (girl) students to the museum to excite them about science and space. There was a strong feeling across the participants in favour of the PHM continuing to represent science, technology, transport, engineering, applied arts, design and social history. Someone even mentioned domestic history. No one was in favour of the Powerhouse Ultimo fashion, design and creative industries precinct, although they were very careful not to mention this decision in the PowerPoint.

#### ***Other comments.***

- Chris Lawrence said construction had commenced on the Parramatta site. Castle Hill will be finished early next year.
- There was welcome acknowledgement of how grateful the PHM staff were that people worked so hard to save the PHM. But what will finally be saved – that is the big question.
- There was strong support for the science, space, transport and technology exhibitions, interactivity and robotics and fostering curiosity in children.
- There was also support for the PHM continuing to offer a diversity of exhibitions across its collections.
- Someone criticised how drab the floor of pots was, and the poor lighting and generally dark spaces, but as we know the turbine hall was never designed for small objects. It was always a silly idea putting ceramics there.
- People appreciated the great volumes of the PHM and seeing suspended planes and spacecraft.
- There was strong support for the PHM being a museum, getting back to its core mission.
- People criticised the museum's marketing and communications as diluted and unfocused, not telling people what is on, and also the signage and labels.
- While one architect made a determined criticism of the PHM's architecture no one else supported this and a number of participants praised the architecture, the aesthetics of the building, its design values, and the transport gallery and working steam engines.
- Someone raised the flood risk issue at Parramatta and others said it was not as accessible as the PHM.
- There were several comments in praise of the Harwood building.

#### ***And some further thoughts...***

- The draft CMP must be made available for comment before it is released with the DA concept by which time it will be set in concrete.
- We – the PMA – regret the lack of transparency in the way the consultation sessions entirely failed to mention the 2021 decision to shrink the PHM into a fashion, design and creative

industries precinct and remove all but a few of the transport and engineering objects. That is a striking omission designed to mislead and deceive and ensure that participants did not comment on this drastic change of focus.

- There was no mention of the fact the CEO has already decided to change the museum's entry.
- Of note the main visual for the 'renewal' shows a big doorway punched through the boiler hall and a row of shops and cafés at the bottom of the switch house.
- But there were repeated assertions that the renewal program will have more exhibition space. That can only mean that they intend to insert new floors in the building.
- The framework of the 'consultations' on the weekend was narrow and partly designed to elicit criticism of the building.

### **3.02:**

Our Consultancy meeting was satisfying in that we didn't just listen to presentations, and everyone in the audience was invited to comment, and to be recorded and documented (without identification). However, most comments were critical of current processes.

The audience was very supportive of maintaining the breadth of the collection across Decorative Arts and Design, Science and Technology and Social History in Ultimo, yet apprehensive about reducing its scope across all areas and critical of the current 'Fashion and Design' museum focus! While the purpose, we were told, was to talk about buildings in Ultimo, I noted the primary issue for planners was the need for a brief that clearly explained what was going to be taking place in whatever buildings we are talking about. While there have been many claims and statements, there do not appear to be any real decisions – and certainly no published ones (as there were in 1988) – of exactly what will be located there. The 1988 opening marked a very new approach to engagement and understanding of the collection, compared with former practices of 'design storage' (which is now being offered in Castle Hill, if anyone can find their way there) and current 'art experiences' with limited displayed background and information. If there is a published brief we can comment even more clearly. It was also pointed out how the central location as a state museum, and the historical relevance and appropriate use of all its buildings to display the collection and its stories, are essential to maintain.

### **3.03:**

I went to the last one at 3. It was very frustrating indeed. I hate the cobbled controlled generic questions to the audience – it's no way to be a community consultation. Most speakers did not want the Powerhouse as such functions to go to Parra. The woman beside me said "the site is a swamp" and she used to live there. I said my bit. A bit angry as the moderator was determined to keep it on issues relating to the building structure and the site. An architect was there. Much push from the screen about digitising etc ... edging towards "museums of the future" I worried.

The steam engine, the planes now gone etc were raised by older men who seemed to regard the smaller cultural things as able to be shown anywhere – a waste of ceiling height! 2 marvellous very older guides (Tom and a mate) were serious commentators well known to Kylie the moderator.

... We were told not to discuss Parramatta at all. Creative industries wasn't talked about.

There was lots of verbal "thanks to those people who have ensured the Powerhouse will continue at this site" but really they only got interested if someone said it was hard to find your way around or the exhibits had changed etc or what is a space "going to be used for". The presenters dipped hats to Indigenous histories in the area (site) but hadn't found more than residents. (I heard later from a guy there that Emma, deputy director, is hosting a big Indigenous think tank on it all. ) ...We were specifically told not to ask or discuss Parramatta due to the heated variations in thoughts. Hence

designing to enhance people's experiences of collection and historical material couldn't be on our agenda. Didn't stop the group's Bolshi mood though.

### **3.04:**

#### **Extra submission following first Consultation session for PHM Conservation Management Plan**

##### ***The purpose of the buildings? As part of your decisions?***

Over more than 100 years the Museum (and it is a MUSEUM of objects with significant and influential histories, not a contemporary art or entertainment centre) has been unique in offering understandings and inter-relationships between designing, making and materials across decorative/applied arts in metal, ceramics, textiles, glass, etc ('fashion' being just one aspect) , as well as design, technology and innovation in industry, science and technology – and the underlying significant social and cultural histories of all of them – and us! Audiences across all age groups have always been keen to research these histories to help them understand contemporary and future contexts.

When the museum re-opened in 1988, the proposed content across various themes was very well published and, as I said at the consultation, it marked a very new approach to engagement and understanding, compared with former practices of 'design storage' (which is now being offered in Castle Hill, if anyone can find their way there). I also have to say, that whoever put together the visual presentation was unfair in their selection of a quote from the then Director, in that it was a performance centre not a museum. The truth is that he was saying it offered new ways of engagement with the collection, other than just display storage – BUT IT WAS ABOUT ACCESSING UNDERSTANDING OF THE COLLECTION! It was NOT something that replaced exhibiting the collection, as appears to be often the case now. I hope you refer to the published documentation of exhibitions and exhibition spaces available from 1988, because so many of them have now been taken over with cafes, shop and storage, and earlier, with UTS lecture spaces.

Also, (thinking of your questions regarding access) the Wran building was enticingly open, engaging and appealing, with insights through Harris Street windows, and a very welcoming entrance from the forecourt which does not appear now. In fact, those wonderful spaces along Harris Street, and the galleries above (eg what was the Asian gallery) are now dark and dangerous spaces, where it is often impossible to clearly understand or appreciate what is being offered.

That is another issue: the PHM has always had a professional approach to providing information such as overall themes, subthemes, informative labels and related AVs etc. NOW, if labels are actually (rarely) provided, you can't read anything because of tiny typefaces, or without subthemes, understand why groupings are together – and many locations are too dark to enter. Despite conservation concerns, these conditions do not coincide with displays in eg. Australian Museum, National Museum or other state Museums.

And, of course, thinking about buildings, which is what you wanted to talk about in the consultation session, it is absolutely clear that the historic buildings in Ultimo are perfect for the themes associated with design, science and technology – aeroplanes, engines, space craft, steam revolution etc etc ... the Parramatta design is simply is not appropriate or viable for this. Not to mention flood dangers! And we are told there are to be no permanent/changing displays! As well, apart from having its own significant history, the Harwood building has been a vital adjacent location for the collection, with necessary office and workshop access for curatorial, conservation, registration, editorial, technical and exhibition development, IT and exhibition design needs, as projects evolve. AND where key members of the audience could visit. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE to maintain that liaison with a distant location such as Castle Hill, and not reasonable to replace that access with artist studios for people with no professional linkage with the collection (other than bringing in rents??)

I refer to a publication produced when the PHM opened in 1988. It very clearly documents the scope and intent of the new venue, and remained a significant underpinning of its program over subsequent decades. THIS IS NOTICEABLY MISSING FROM THE CURRENT CONSULTATION PROCESS: we were asked to comment on buildings, but this is only relevant if the content and rationale of the museum is clearly identified. Also included, is a listing of all exhibitions from 1988 until 2018. This should demonstrate the scope that is possible within these buildings.

We have worked for 7 years to save the Powerhouse Museum in its Ultimo site, and were very glad when this was announced in 2020, but we are now very confused and disillusioned about what the Government? Arts Minister? Create NSW? Trustees? Management? think will take its place. It was not at all reassuring to listen to the new Arts Minister speaking at the recent inquiry hearing last week; he was mouthing the usual Harwin platitudes. We want the museum that is so very much a NSW and Australian historic institution to remain, and continue to evolve – as an engaging Museum across all fields.

### 3.05

MIXED REACTIONS TO MAAS “OPEN WEEKEND”. When we (Save the Powerhouse Facebook) went along to the MAAS’ open weekend (March 19 and 20) we didn’t know what to expect and were initially encouraged by the healthy stream of visitors - parents, kids, couples - who were entering the Museum. It was interesting to see them flocking to the traditionally popular exhibits, especially the revered “Steam Revolution” - where almost all the engines were working - and not even pausing to glance at walls covered with photographs of supposed “personalities” or some clothes draped on life-size plastic models.

During the weekend MAAS had organised five “community consultation” sessions to inform a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) <http://tiny.cc/vr0quz> which they plan to develop to “guide the future design, use and management of the museum.”

We attended the 3:00pm Sunday session, which was moderated, like the others, by MAAS’ steely PR consultant Kylie Cochrane. Sixteen members of the public were present and all were invited to give their views on five general questions <http://tiny.cc/wr0quz>, ranging from “what they valued most about the Museum” to “what are the opportunities for change.”

Most were eager to speak about the Powerhouse project, and potential renewal, but Cochrane would tolerate no digression, firmly silencing two women who wanted to talk about the flooded “Parramatta Powerhouse” site.

Our impressions? The session as whole was not exciting or original, but we accept that others may have had different experiences...

Senior museums consultant Kylie Winkworth went to the 1:00pm Sunday session. “There were about 22 people, among the attendees quite a few teachers. There was support for the museum’s exhibitions and education programs in science, physics and space and comments on the importance of learning by doing and the museum’s strength in hands on activities.

There was a strong feeling across the participants in favour of the PHM continuing to represent science, technology, transport, engineering, applied arts, crafts, design and social history. No one spoke in favour of the Powerhouse Ultimo fashion, design and creative industries precinct. Yet...the PowerPoint introduction failed to mention the decision last year to turn the museum into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct. The presenters...thanked the community for the campaign to save the Powerhouse Museum, but they didn’t mention that in fact the Powerhouse Museum has NOT been saved. No one was in favour of the new name of Powerhouse Ultimo - it’s the Powerhouse Museum which is indivisible from its home in a former power station. I was reminded of the importance of the museum’s once highly regarded education programs, and that in the online survey question of what required improvement at ‘Powerhouse Ultimo’ the list of options did not mention education or activities for children and families.”

Former senior Powerhouse Curator Grace Cochrane found similar sentiments at her session on Saturday morning. “Our Consultancy meeting was satisfying in that everyone in the audience was invited to comment, and to be recorded and documented (without identification). The audience was very supportive of maintaining the breadth of the collection across Decorative Arts and Design, Science and Technology and Social History in Ultimo, yet apprehensive about reducing its scope across all areas and critical of the current “Fashion and Design” museum focus!...There do not appear to be any real decisions – and certainly no published ones (as there were in 1988) – of exactly what will be located there. It was also pointed out how the central location as a state museum, and the historical relevance and appropriate use of all its buildings to display the collection and its stories, are essential to maintain.”

And finally at our own session, we were pleased to learn something new and possibly significant, which the Create NSW representative let slip at the end of his presentation: “The (re)development will have a NEW BUILDING COMPONENT” which raises a whole raft of new questions!