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Kylie Winkworth: The Powerhouse Museum is **Not** Saved

The Powerhouse Museum Alliance opposes the NSW Government's wasteful, destructive and unnecessary plans to erase all trace of the Powerhouse Museum (PHM) via a \$500 million design competition and redevelopment. **This is not museum renewal but museum erasure.**

The NSW Government quietly lodged the EIS for the redevelopment of the Powerhouse Museum into a creative industries precinct while everyone was distracted by the NSW budget. The Government is giving the community just 28 days to review and comment on more than 2,000 pages of reports and plans. <https://pp.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-renewal> Submissions close on 21 July. If you care about the future of the Powerhouse Museum please lodge a submission stating that you **object** to the development plans.

The Powerhouse Museum is at risk in the Government's plans to turn the PHM into a creative industries precinct at a cost of \$500 million. This is a fundamental change of use and abandonment of the Powerhouse Museum's historic mission as Australia's only museum of applied arts and sciences. The project is a broken promise by the NSW Premier. Two years ago the now Premier announced that the Powerhouse Museum would be staying, and would *continue to welcome visitors to its world renowned exhibits*. The media release stated that the Powerhouse Museum *would continue to provide an **outstanding visitor experience in the areas of technology, science, engineering and design...** would complement the future focussed Parramatta facility...would retain jobs at Ultimo and would explore if some of the funds earmarked for relocation costs could be used on renovations*. None of these commitments have been kept. In June 2021, behind closed doors, and without consultation, explanation or a transparent policy process, Premier Berejiklian decreed the PHM would be a fashion, design and creative industries precinct.

After the July 2020 announcement that the PHM was saved, the former Arts Minister personally asked the PMA to re-engage with the museum to support the renewal of the Powerhouse Museum. In late 2020 MAAS and Create NSW established a master planning dialogue and a curatorial dialogue to advise on the museum's renewal. Participants were asked to sign confidentiality agreements, although many did not agree. As the meetings progressed it was apparent there was a shadow planning process underway where the Government and their consultants were going through the motions while working on alternate plans which were not disclosed to the whole 'dialogue' meetings. The curatorial dialogue and master plan process was not informed about this work which began in late 2020 until May this year on the eve of the release of the EIS. Nothing came of these 'dialogues' which were cover for another type of development inconsistent with the meaning of the word 'renewal'.

The conservation management plan (CMP) in the EIS prepared by Curio Projects was in secret preparation while the Government, Create NSW and MAAS claimed that Design 5 was preparing a CMP, and working with the architect Lionel Glendenning on a set of design principles to be incorporated in the CMP's conservation policies. The Design 5 CMP was terminated after the assessment of significance and community feedback from the March consultation sessions, which entirely failed to mention that the PHM was to be turned into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct. Participants at the March workshops were asked if they supported the PHM's renewal, but were not told about major elements of the project which go to the heart of the

Powerhouse Museum's purpose, audiences, significance and community affection. Not mentioned at all was the decision to turn the PHM into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct. As expected, the consultation reports in the EIS misrepresent the feedback from those consultations. The architect of the Powerhouse Museum Lionel Glendenning was not consulted or contacted by Curio Projects at any stage in the preparation of the CMP and Heritage Impact Statement. Lionel Glendenning's design principles have no bearing on the SEARS or EIS.

Lionel Glendenning puts **the cost of genuine renewal of the Real Powerhouse Museum, its exhibitions, infrastructure and public domain at \$250m**. But as outlined in the EIS, this mis-named renewal project will demolish all trace of the Sulman award winning Powerhouse and replace the collection and operational facilities in the Harwood building, the former tram depot which is an integral part of the PHM's history, heritage, design conception and operational capacity. No case has been made to evict the collections, change the museum's entry, or explain the decision made behind closed doors to reduce the museum's focus to fashion, design and creative industries. Since the PHM opened in 1988 it has won dozens of awards and was recognised as one of Australia's great museums. It has ample space for the display of science, technology, engineering, transport **and** fashion and design.

This development will erase all trace of the Sulman award winning Powerhouse including its heritage adaptation which was the inspiration for Tate Modern in the former Bankside Power station, and other adaptations of industrial heritage buildings for cultural purposes. There is no explanation or justification for the intent behind the plans to gut and erase all trace of Lionel Glendenning's Sulman award winning museum, just 33 years old, and radically alter the museum's purpose, form, functions and facilities. **A museum designed for a working life of more than 100 years is being trashed after just 33 years. The design competition and plans are wasteful, destructive and unnecessary.**

When the MAAS CEO was asked at the last museum inquiry hearing about the justification for this scale of funding all she was able to say was that the roof was leaking and the museum was not of international standard. A leaking roof is a matter of routine maintenance, not justification for a \$500 million infrastructure project. Deliberate or not, maintenance of the PHM has been neglected, despite an increase in funding. The second assertion is ridiculous and incorrect. Up until the LNP Government's campaign to evict and redevelop the PHM, the museum had a remarkable record of hosting international exhibitions, including Leonardo da Vinci's Codex Leicester in 2000.

The mis-named 'Ultimo Renewal' project shows the NSW Government **is intent on implementing the same scheme outlined in the 2018 business case, only now it is costing taxpayers \$500 million:**

- the Powerhouse name and brand transferred to a billion dollar commercially focussed development at Parramatta which is not a museum;
- an expanded MDC large object store at Castle Hill, partially replacing the PHM's state of the art co-located conservation, workshop and storage facilities in the Harwood building;
- all the collections removed from the Harwood building to Castle Hill, along with the staff, for no museological or public benefit;
- the museum's nationally significant power and transport collections evicted from their purpose designed settings and sent to Castle Hill, or offered on long term loan to volunteer museums, without an assessment of significance or consideration of their *in situ* relationship with the PHM's spaces, underpinning narrative and its design;

- the real Powerhouse Museum radically downsized, renamed and redeveloped into a creative industries precinct with subsidised artists' studios, retail, cafes, and some fashion and design displays, no longer even called a museum;
- the Wran to be demolished;
- the Harwood building offered as a development site;
- and the MAAS Act rewritten to change the museum's purpose and remit.

The NSW Government is **taking the power out of the Powerhouse**, along with its collections and museum functions, and will spend \$500 million to turn the museum into a commercially focussed development that will have nothing in common with the PHM's identity and mission. There is a directive not to call the Powerhouse Museum a museum – it is Powerhouse Ultimo. MAAS has advertised for a commercial director to sweat the museum's real estate with commercial activities and uses unrelated to the museum's purpose and work. This person will **reshape the museum experience through curated food and beverage operations, events, retail, tours and entertainment**. At the Parramatta Powerhouse not one square metre of space is dedicated to museum exhibitions or collections. It is entirely possible this part time museum concept will be the model for what is left of the PHM after its \$500m makeover. The collection is being exiled to Castle Hill without consultation, risk assessment or consideration of the costs and impacts of reduced public access. The same unproven commercial business model proposed for Parramatta is now being used to evict the collections and erase the identity and purpose of the PHM.

The project justification for the Ultimo Creative Industries Precinct in the EIS cites the Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+. This policy was released in February 2019 and reflects the intent of the 2018 business case when the real Powerhouse Museum was scheduled for closure and major redevelopment.

Following the MAAS relocation to Parramatta, the Government plans to invest in retaining a creative industries presence in Ultimo. The precinct will be a home for fashion, design and cultural exchange, with enhanced public space and pedestrian connections. A new museum will celebrate Australian and international design, fashion, creativity and architecture. A new 1500-seat Broadway-style theatre is also planned, which will provide a state-of-the-art performance space for musicals, live music and screen-based programming. P. 71

https://create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190206_CIP2025.pdf

This is Premier Perrottet's broken promise. The decision to turn the PHM into a fashion, design and creative industries precinct is a fundamental break with the museum's mission and purpose. There was no policy process, options paper or consultation around this decision. Nor was there any consideration of the impacts of narrowing the museum's remit on the PHM's traditional family audiences, let alone visitors from regional NSW. The decision was made in secret by the former Premier and others. There is still no explanatory policy paper. In a taste of what's to come, the PHM has abandoned interest in family audiences. For the first time since the museum opened there was no summer exhibition for kids and families. The membership program has been closed. When participants at the March consultations on the Design 5 CMP, (not the CMP that is used in the EIS), noted the removal of family-focussed exhibitions, the response was **we're after a different demographic now**. All this runs counter to the PHM's core purpose a museum of applied arts and sciences, and its traditional appeal to families, enhanced by its location in a family-focussed tourism precinct, close to Haymarket, Paddy's Market and Darling Harbour.

The Arts Minister stated that *as a cultural institution the Powerhouse has a responsibility to support creative industries in NSW*, see attached. This is incorrect. It is not the purpose of a public museum to function as an industry development body or an off shoot of the Australia Council, any more than it is the responsibility of the Art Gallery of NSW to support the commercial gallery sector or the Sydney Contemporary art fair. The V&A does not mount fashion parades as part of London Fashion Week. In a taste of what's to come, the museum removed an exhibition for a one night Fashion Week event, spending more than \$100,000 of taxpayers' money producing a fashion parade for a young designer, not counting staff costs. Museums as permanent institutions must make careful long term judgements on their collection and exhibition program, independent of commercial and industry pressures. The obligation of museums is about service to the wider community, not particular industries or artists. This distinction is embedded in the MAAS Act, although it seems to have escaped the notice of the MAAS Trust, its CEO and the Minister. The PHM now has more artists in residence and artistic associates than curators.

While Ultimo and Central is being redeveloped by the Government into a tech and education precinct, MAAS is stripping out the very collections which would do most to contribute to the education, innovation and technology remit of Tech Central. The large volumes of the PHM, which were purpose designed for the museum's nationally significant engineering and transport collections, will be used instead for pots and frocks and fashion parades. Just three large objects might remain at the PHM, deprived of their narrative context, left as props for fashion parades and night time entertainment. For the first time since the 1960s the museum has no curator of transport and engineering for this significant collection which for most people is indivisible from the history and identity of the Powerhouse Museum. This can only ease the pathway for their eviction from the PHM. In 2019, before Covid, the popular transport and power exhibitions were seen by 757,000 visitors, while only 15,547 visitors got to Castle Hill.

It is policy stupidity and cultural vandalism to gut a 142 year old public museum, designed with state of the art facilities that are only 33 years old, ripping out the science, technology, transport and engineering collections – indeed all the collections – just when the area is developing as a tech and education precinct. Even so this extravagantly wasteful and destructive project will inevitably be badged a sustainable.

Sydney has just one major heritage museum and this is what is now at risk. In contrast, the city is relatively well-supplied with contemporary art facilities. The NSW Government is already funding the development of the National Art School as a creative precinct, adding to other contemporary arts developments, including the MCA, Sydney Modern, Carriageworks, Walsh Bay and ArtSpace. If Sydney needs another creative industries precinct a better option would be to develop this at Carriageworks, strengthening the identity of the precinct. There is no public benefit turning high value, purpose designed museum spaces, located in a major tourism precinct, into subsidised artists' studios. As we have seen with the City of Sydney's recent studio initiatives, there are other mechanisms to increase the opportunities for artists to work in the city in free or affordable studios, without cannibalising the collection facilities and exhibition spaces of the PHM.

The NSW Government has not opened a major new museum since the Powerhouse opened in 1988. In that time Sydney's population has grown by nearly 40%. The Committee for Sydney's benchmarking reports show that **Sydney ranks at the bottom of more 30 global peer cities** for the number of museums and the diversity of local cultural experiences. In the 11 years of the LNP state government, more than \$2 billion has been allocated to arts and cultural infrastructure, but less than

5% has gone to museums – not counting Parramatta which is not a museum. Where other countries such as the UK have built vibrant tourism attractions based on heritage places – including industrial heritage, the NSW Government has failed to recognise the economic value and visitor interest in heritage places and museums. In the year before Covid, high value, long stay international cultural tourists spent more than \$14b in NSW. (Destination NSW Cultural and Heritage Tourism to NSW reports) The No.1 interest of high value international cultural tourists is visiting history, heritage buildings, monuments and sites. That is not where the money has gone.

There has been a strategic misallocation of cultural infrastructure funding to the performing and contemporary arts, and stadiums, with consequent opportunity costs in not conserving and opening new history and heritage places and precincts. In the last 10 years significant heritage buildings, precincts and structures have been sold, leased, redeveloped, demolished and got the box on top treatment. Pyrmont, Ultimo, the PHM and Central are next. Adding to this this apparent aversion to history, the PHM has now removed the last of the museum's popular social history exhibitions, having earlier abandoned its once extensive regional services program, the Australian Dress Register, and the Migration Heritage Centre which worked in partnership with councils and migrant communities across Western Sydney and regional NSW. Alone among all the states and territories, NSW – the foundation state and landscape of first contact and colonisation - has no museum for NSW history.

The recent NSW Budget allocates just \$12 million for the Creative Capital Program to deliver new cultural infrastructure projects in regional NSW. Money wasted on gutting the Powerhouse Museum so it can be turned into a commercially focussed creative industries precinct could be better spent on museum infrastructure and development in regional NSW and major cities like Penrith, Campbelltown and Wollongong.

There is just one mention in the Heritage Impact Statement in the EIS to the PHM as a Sulman award winning museum. None of the major design elements of the multi award winning Powerhouse Museum will be preserved in the \$500m design and demolition competition. In its first 20 years the PHM won numerous museum, design and tourism awards and set new directions for museology in Australia in areas such interactivity, design excellence, accessibility and storytelling through collections and exhibitions. All of this has disappeared from the floors of the PHM, along with the spatial and thematic zoning of exhibition themes which was part of the original design conception; ie large transport and engineering objects in the major spaces, history in the mid zones, decorative arts in the switch house etc. In the EIS the Powerhouse Museum is not treated as a whole, or even as a cultural institution, but is on offer as empty building. There is no masterplan or recognition of the relationship between the industrial history and heritage of the site and the related power, transport and engineering collections for which the museum was purpose designed. The site is broken into a heritage core and disposable elements such as the Wran building and galleria. Theoretically the Wran building may be retained, but it will not survive the design competition, given the development opportunity for at least a 31 metre building on Harris St. The same option was open to retain Willow Grove in the Parramatta design competition. The Government went to the 2019 election promising it would be saved, only to demolish the last surviving riverside villa in Parramatta under cover of Covid-19.

It is shameful that a museum that purports to care about architecture and design is now intent on erasing all trace of its Sulman award winning building and multi award winning design. All the great historic museums, founded in the industrial revolution from the international exhibition movement -

such as The Met, the V&A and the Science Museum in London, value their heritage buildings, and the layering of history on their site. They have also retained and enhanced their major historic installations. They understand these buildings are the museum's No.1 exhibit and are central to the museum's brand, visitor experience and public esteem. Not in Sydney, not by MAAS, intent on destroying its own history and mission to turn the museum into another contemporary arts centre like Carriageworks.

The Harwood building, Sydney's largest and oldest tram depot, which is an integral part of the PHM's history, heritage, design conception and functionality, is not even in the project scope and has no heritage protection. It was purchased by the MAAS Trust in 1964 for use as a transport museum and was the first stage in the development of the Powerhouse Museum. The collection and conservation facilities in the Harwood building are being decommissioned and the collection sent to Castle Hill at a cost of more than \$100 million, and without any consultation, risk assessment, museological rationale or benefit to the collections or the community. The collection will be **less accessible and at risk every time objects are moved**. No museum that has its collections at the centre of its programs would give up this state of the art conservation, storage and workshop facility to move operations to an inferior, distant and less accessible site. That is inexplicable. Compounding the waste, parts of the development scope in the 'Ultimo Renewal' project entail inserting back of house operational facilities, including a loading dock, into the PHM, facilities that are currently provided in the Harwood building. This is more waste and degradation of the museum's original design conception and functionality. Once emptied the Harwood building will ultimately be a development site. Assurances that there are no plans to develop the Harwood building are not believable. Why else would the building, which for 120 years has been functionally and historically tethered to the Ultimo Power House/ PHM, be excluded from the 'Ultimo Renewal' project if it wasn't going to be offered for development? Why else would it be emptied and de-commissioned of its museum and collection functions if these services are not important to the future of the PHM site **as a museum?**

This project, assisted by an absurdly compromised heritage listing, shows that the system of heritage protection in NSW is broken. The politicised handling of the listing of just the shell of the former Ultimo Power House (not the Powerhouse Museum), over dozens of objections, is just one element in a process where Government agencies have evaded responsibility for the impartial assessment of places of heritage significance. That includes MAAS and the failure of the NSW Heritage Council to consider the National Trust's listing nomination of the **whole Powerhouse Museum site** which was an **integrated industrial heritage site and museological and design conception. It defies belief that a treasured 142 year old cultural institution that has been in Ultimo since 1893 has no heritage protection and is not recognised as having any value in the EIS, or by its own CEO and Trustees.**

As we saw in the Parramatta Powerhouse, the EIS is focussed on the **building design opportunities** and does not include consideration of less intrusive and more cost effective museum renewal options, or the well-known views of the community about retaining the PHM's most significant exhibition installations which were part of the museum's design conception. These include *Transport, Flight and Space* in the boiler hall, one of the world's great transport exhibitions; *Steam Revolution* with steam engines working under live steam in the engine house; and the majestic installation of the 1785 Boulton and Watt and No.1 loco and carriages in the galleria, which was purpose designed for these internationally significant objects, and is the starting point for the PHM's underpinning narrative of innovation, engineering and design from the industrial revolution.

Nor has there been any assessment of the rationale for required elements of the project such as altering the museum's entry. The PHM has always been accessible from the Goods Line, via the museum's rear courtyard. Contrary to the artist's impression that shows the courtyard bathed in a golden glow, it is in fact mired in shadow for most of the year and over shadowed by the poor quality Urban Nest development to the east. Forgotten in all this is the grandeur of Lionel Glendenning's original entry through the vaulted Wran building where visitors arrive at a sunny public square, set for replacement by a towering high rise in the EIS. This entry was one of the world's great museum atriums, a place for people to mingle with wonder and anticipation. Showing little understanding of the language of museum design, the MAAS CEO favours a concierge type museum entry like the hotel desk set among retail offerings planned for Parramatta. Contrary to all great museum buildings, the 'Ultimo Renewal' will have visitors entering from the bottom, from the south shaded courtyard, with no sense of the unveiling and surprise experienced in the unfolding succession of majestic spaces in Lionel Glendenning's original design for the PHM. The money to be wasted wrecking the PHM's design conception would be better spent fixing the access, design and visual slum that is the Broadway end of the Goods Line.

The 'Ultimo Renewal' (sic) project has strong echoes of the CEO's unproven concept for Parramatta, instead of the PHM being renewed as a heritage museum in a way that complements the future-focussed Parramatta development, as Perrottet promised two years ago. The blocking and stacking of small spaces in the proposed 10 storey new building on Harris St is a case in point, and the carve up of the boiler house with a concierge type entry, past the shops and cafes. The suggestion that the two projects will have complementary areas of focus – Parramatta about STEM and Ultimo with fashion and design - is not supported by recent media announcements and statements by the CEO.

The PMA questions the decision to hand another \$500 million infrastructure project to MAAS when it should be focussed on delivering the \$1 billion Parramatta project, about which there are serious doubts. These include the business case which will have public servants staffing the 24 x 7 concierge desk and running the accommodation and events business. The functionality of the development is in doubt – with the project aiming for two million visitors a year, running multiple concurrent commercial and public events across seven performance spaces, all resourced from one loading dock and no parking. How can that work? Then there are doubts about how or if large objects can be moved into the building, and the practicality of incoming exhibitions sharing back of house space with roadies and caterers. Not to mention the flood risks and whether the facility will be safe for visitors and the collection – a mere detail which will not be considered until after the building is finished. Two years out from the scheduled opening and there is still no information at all about the exhibitions, education content and operations of the development, and a proposed operating model not used by any museum anywhere in the world.

The PHM will close in 2023. After that, the Powerhouse Museum as we know it will be finished. It may not reopen in any recognisable form as a museum. The museum word is going, along with the PHM's defining power, transport and engineering collections.

Everyone supports – and expected - genuine renewal of the Powerhouse Museum's exhibitions, infrastructure and public domain. No one is arguing for a museum set in aspic. But there is no explanation, demonstrated cultural need or policy justification for the 'Ultimo Renewal' creative industries project. **Instead of museum renewal we are getting renewal of the Government's internationally embarrassing vendetta to gut the Powerhouse Museum.** After seven and a half years of battling to save the Powerhouse Museum the Government is proposing another wasteful,

destructive, ad hoc, policy-free museum infrastructure decision, once again made without considering options, museum needs and opportunities, and without the benefit of a museum strategy or policy for NSW.

Kylie Winkworth June 2022