

Save the Powerhouse – email 20 May 2022

POWERHOUSE ULTIMO “More unanswered questions”

Hi Everyone,

WHAT HAVE WE REALLY LEARNED ABOUT THE “POWERHOUSE RENEWAL?”

Two questionably-named “Community Consultations held recently about the future of the Powerhouse have left us – as usual- with as many questions as answers.

In mid-March (18 & 19), MAAS organised an “open weekend” in Ultimo when admission to the Museum was free, and members of the public were invited to attend one of several “consultation sessions”, all tightly orchestrated by Create NSW’s then PR Company, Aurecon.

This was followed on May 16 by an online Ethos Urban “Public Information Seminar” on the “Powerhouse Ultimo Renewal State Significant Project”, with speakers from Ethos, the Powerhouse, Create NSW and Curio.

Even if the object of both exercises was clearly to enable the Government to tick the (required) “public consultation” box, Powerhouse loyalists were able to gather some useful information about planned future directions

Based on numerous comments received from people who attended the “open weekend” and/or “community consultation sessions” (including our own experience), and/or who completed MAAS’ associated flawed survey, we can confirm a high level of agreement on what the local community wants, and more importantly, does NOT want!

Despite moderator Kyle Cochran’s firm refusal in the closed sessions to tolerate any discussion except for preselected subjects listed, attendees unanimously REJECTED.

-1- The proposed NAME CHANGES to “Powerhouse Ultimo” and “Powerhouse Parramatta”. There is, and has always been, one Powerhouse Museum, in Ultimo. A new cultural institution in western Sydney is welcomed, but it must have its own name, identity and purpose, while the Powerhouse remains intact.

-2- MAAS’ cherished notion of REFOCUSING THE POWERHOUSE AS A DESIGN AND FASHION CENTRE. “*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*” (Our comment). “Design” is simply an important component of the Museum’s original “arts and sciences” framework, and healthy numbers of weekend visitors demonstrated a complete lack of public interest, by walking straight past some “frocks” draped on plastic mannequin to reach the ever popular Steam Revolution exhibit.

-3- The concept of TURNING THE MUSEUM INTO A “COMMERCIAL INDUSTRIES” HUB.

The format of the May online “Information Seminar” appeared designed to limit attendees’ interaction by preventing them from knowing who else was present or seeing their questions. We nonetheless learned that

- DA STAGE 1 (concept and envelope, including a DRAFT CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN will “soon” be placed on exhibition for 4 weeks, followed by an ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION, and then a DA STAGE 2 (detailed design).

- Neither the Harwood building nor the collections, are part of the “Powerhouse House Renewal” project and, most significantly.

- THE WRAN BUILDING MAY BE DEMOLISHED depending on the result of the architectural competition

- The museum will close during the demolition/construction works, but when and for how long will depend on the result of the Architectural Competition.

- Loco No1, the Boulton & Watt engine and Catalina will be retained as promised, but how to protect them during the possible Wran building demolition has not yet been considered -

The Wran and Harwood Buildings are not protected by any (state or local) heritage listing and therefore are not part of the projected Conservation Management Plan.

- MAAS cannot yet fully detail the future use of the “museum” but there will be exhibitions of the collections as well as national and international exhibitions.

Some spaces will be used for COMMERCIAL purpose but there will not be any private residential component.

So while MAAS is short on detail, at least future intentions have been broadly outlined, and we must now focus on overturning the ludicrous idea that our time-honoured Powerhouse Museum can become a mere “fashion hub” - especially in the light of the recently-issued SEARS document <https://pp.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-renewal> that precedes the Environmental Impact Statement for the Renewal Project, the Powerhouse is defined as “AN EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATION FACILITY!”

Save the Powerhouse

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