

## SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC MEETING TO CELEBRATE PHM CAMPAIGN ANNIVERSARY

[Sent in early November via email by:]

Save the Powerhouse Museum [savethepowerhouse@gmail.com](mailto:savethepowerhouse@gmail.com)

Hi Everyone,

As many of you know, 'Save the Powerhouse' organised a public meeting last Friday (October 28) at the Ultimo Community Centre to 'mark the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the campaign to save the Powerhouse Museum', and we were impressed by the knowledge and obvious dedication of people who attended from our local area.

Equally impressive were the insights of a number of distinguished speakers on different aspects of museum management. We heard from

- Founding PHM Director Dr Lindsay Sharp (by video link) who observed that "if you had seen this unfold in any civilized country...you could not believe it"
- Deputy Lord Mayor Sylvie Ellsmore, on the importance of conserving public space
- Kylie Winkworth, former Powerhouse trustee, whose detailed slide show presented the real history of the current PHM "renewal" debacle
- Former Transport Curator Andrew Grant who spoke with objectivity and good sense of the central role of the Harwood Building in Powerhouse operations
- and Alan Coker, heritage consultant, who created the Conservation Management Plan for the Sydney Opera House.

Messages of support were received and read from Senator David Shoebridge <http://tiny.cc/Owj0vz> and Shadow Arts Minister John Graham <http://tiny.cc/zvj0vz>, who were unable to attend in person, and former PHM Deputy Director Jennifer Sanders capably moderated the whole event.

See video here <https://youtu.be/27inpR780nc>

A lively Q&A session followed, when community members indicated unanimously that - the 'renewal' as proposed needs complete revision to reflect PHM's traditional status as a professional MUSEUM (of Applied Arts and Sciences) rather than reduce it to a mere 'facility'

- the whole approach of the proposed renewal is too "commercial" and
  - there has been no genuine consultation with the community about a PHM "renewal"
- These key points have been incorporated in a draft resolution summarising the general direction of the meeting <http://tiny.cc/2wj0vz>.

Watch this space for news of more 'Save' events in the four months leading up to the NSW state elections in March 2023, and a hoped-for change of Government!

-----  
**In following days, Save the Powerhouse summarised the talks given, that can be seen and heard in full on the video of the meeting: <https://youtu.be/27inpR780nc>**  
-----

**Opening speaker Dr Lindsay Sharp**, who joined the meeting by video link from his home in NSW's South, needs no introduction.

As most people who have followed any part of this campaign will know, "the Powerhouse Museum was a grand ambition and shared vision of then NSW Premier Neville Wran, Museum Director Lindsay Sharp and Government Architect Lionel Glendenning."

In mid-1979 Wran announced that the derelict Ultimo Power Station and Tramsheds "would become a new museum for Sydney" and in March 1988 he opened the Powerhouse Museum.

Lindsay Sharp as its Founding Director, led the team responsible for creating the Museum we know today, and has closely followed recent events in PHM's 30 year history with particular concern, summed up by his incisive observation that "no other civilised country - or even uncivilised - would even consider moving an established museum elsewhere." The proposed relocation, he said, would waste tens of millions of dollars, making the plan "a total waste of political capital and actual funds desperately needed by museums elsewhere throughout NSW".

The "move" also required the demolition of several important heritage buildings in Parramatta. "It will require very expensive and highly risk-prone remediation – reducing the new museum budget even more and endangering irreplaceable collections" Dr Sharp said he was also concerned that the promise of keeping the Ultimo museum site as a "cultural facility" was far too vague, and at worst, could mean anything from an art gallery to a kid's playground. He concluded "If there is a change of Government (in March) we should seek to explore what options are presented to us and identify these options to see if we can unscramble this untidiness."

**"WE CAN FIX** this if we have a Government that will listen and allow us to advise."

Video Link [https://youtu.be/o\\_BnX-FUzKM](https://youtu.be/o_BnX-FUzKM) (from 3.30m)

-----

**City of Sydney Deputy Lord Mayor Sylvie Ellsmore** made a lively contribution to the debate with her passionate defence of public space and assets, and her condemnation of the current Government trend to "move them into private hands."

"Save the Powerhouse", she said, "HAS to be about bringing about a change in this system. We need to be vigilant that the Government maintains PHM as a publicly owned asset that future generations will continue to love and enjoy, no matter what changes happen down the track. We need to keep the pressure on."

"One of the reasons why this long campaign has been successful is that community groups have been able to form partnerships with people in Parliament. Two two-year Parliamentary Inquiries into the Government's management of the Powerhouse, and the fact that Liberal MPs have crossed the floor to defend the principle of public ownership of the Powerhouse are just two examples of the community-Parliament bond, and with a state election on the horizon we need to strengthen these ties even further."

"We have all observed the current Government trend to privatisation. They have the idea that if you "renew" something, you just hand it over to private interests, and this applies right across the city on transport land, on public land, and is especially true in Ultimo-Pyrmont.

There is a huge preponderance of new development in this area, but the plan should be about how to grow public space and how to best use those spaces that are still free.

It is essential that community groups form strong alliances to fight privatisation and prepare for the new communities that will be coming in. Protecting and preserving the Powerhouse Museum is a fundamental part of that process.”

In closing her warmly received comments, Cr Ellmore promised to “do all she could” to support the ongoing campaign.

Listen to Sylvie’s contribution HERE <https://youtu.be/bulYJMd3Vbw>

-----

Another speaker to our Public Meeting who needed no introduction to museum lovers was **Kylie Winkworth, a well-known museums expert** and former Powerhouse Museum Trustee. Her skilfully structured slideshow (HERE) traced the shocking recent history of the disastrous “Powerhouse project.” presenting it as “Wrecking the Powerhouse Museum: eight years of Sophistry, Spin and Deception. A cultural crime in 4 Parts“.

It accurately highlighted

-the demolition of historic Willow Grove mansion at Parramatta to make way for the so-called “Powerhouse Parramatta” - which has turned out to be just another commercial entertainment centre

- the current eviction of all the priceless PHM collections to storage at Castle Hill (where’s that?)

- and finally, the threatened redevelopment of the eviscerated museum buildings as a fashion, design and creative industries centre (which no-one has ever wanted except, possibly, fashion promoters aiming to line their pockets) which would result in, as Winkworth said, “The end of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, based in Ultimo since 1893”

The following detailed slideshow convincingly illustrated the sombre outcome she foresees. It is compelling and completely factually correct, but at the same time we feel that “the end of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences” may NOT be inevitable. NSW state elections are just four months away, in March 2023. A change of government could also dramatically change for the better the future of our Powerhouse Museum. That solution lies in OUR hands, so let’s work for it!

Watch Kylie Winkworth’s contribution HERE <https://youtu.be/PRwn7TEUdfc>

-----

**The speakers in the second part of our public meeting on October 28 are all accredited museum experts who have a well-established association with the Powerhouse.**

**Alan Croker**, widely known since 1998 as the distinguished author of the Sydney Opera House Conservation Management Plan, said that last year he was asked to work with other specialists on a “quality CMP” for the Powerhouse Museum. “This (now) exists...although we are not allowed to discuss it publicly.” <https://youtu.be/6t124FH9nX0>

He reflected that in the 1970s the old Ultimo Power Station was “derelict, but Lionel (Glendenning, Architect)... transformed it brilliantly, while respecting Ultimo’s industrial traditions, into a powerful museum that brought together so many aspects of history and heritage.”

He strongly condemned MAAS’ “renewal” plans. “Now **there is a deliberate distortion of**

**process**, large spaces are being disfigured. All buildings must adapt to change, of course, but we must carry important values forward, while developing policies for the future.”

-----

**Andrew Grant**, the next speaker, Transport Heritage Consultant and former PHM Senior Curator Transport, focused on the unique values of the Harwood Building.

<https://youtu.be/SNCL9WrzqA0>

Previously Sydney's largest and oldest tram depot, Harwood was specially adapted by architect Lionel Glendenning to store the Museum's valuable collection and house vital curatorial and maintenance facilities, but is now threatened with destruction under MAAS' "renewal" proposal.

"When designed, Harwood was ahead of its time" Grant said. "This comprehensive in-house facility was at the heart of all aspects of PHM operations. Yet the Government has wilfully ignored all its values. **Destroying the Harwood Building is simply adding to the concept that the Powerhouse will no longer be a museum.**"

-----

**Jennifer Sanders**, our concluding speaker who also efficiently moderated the meeting, as a senior curator, was a key member of the Powerhouse development team. A member of the Museum's Executive from 1988, she was Deputy Director, Collections and Outreach from 2001 to 2009.

She too was involved in the "false Master plan dialogue" and the "renewal" plan which Lionel Glendenning drew up in meticulous detail that "would consider changes while retaining all the Powerhouse's "essential elements" (such as the main entrance on Harris St) - at only half the cost of \$500 million that the Government is prepared to squander. **Yet when the final CMP was submitted, MAAS completely ignored it** "There was absolutely no response" Sanders said.

<https://youtu.be/GF4BJORg68E>

In closing, she reminded the meeting of a recent study by the Heritage Council of NSW <http://tiny.cc/xvs0vz> (page 126) which showed that the Powerhouse is one of five buildings (Recreation and Tourism: Museums, Galleries) "worthy of state heritage listing" and that we "should all work on that issue."

-----

It's hard to believe that after an eight year community campaign, continuous expert advice and two damning Parliamentary Inquiries, the NSW Government still won't listen! Another argument for changing the Government in March 2023.

*Save the Powerhouse*

 **Savethepowerhouse**