

5 May, 2023: Mailout to Powerhouse Museum supporters

Powerhouse Museum: an 8-year update!

What now? Issues, comments, suggestions ...

This update is sent to hundreds of colleagues, both as individuals and in institutions and organisations across NSW, Australia and other countries, who have established important relationships with the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, and who have expressed concerns about our previous government's plans to firstly demolish and move the Museum, and then 'save it' while vastly changing its role and program. You may like to follow this up, to further support the future of the Museum (see below). In summary:

- Yes, keep the main Museum site in Ultimo; Parramatta to have own institutions
- Yes, keep all buildings, and get state heritage listing for 1988 buildings and historic Harwood building
- Yes, as core business stay with 'applied arts (industrial and decorative arts, crafts, design) and sciences' (including industrial and technological) and social history, as always!
- Yes, encourage release of the secret design briefs and secret business cases
- Pause anything leading towards demolition in Ultimo; encourage only appropriate 'renewal'

Just a few weeks after the NSW State Election (25 March, 2023), it is now possible to identify reversals that may be made by our new government, to the destructive plans for the Powerhouse Museum initiated by the previous government in 2014. Even though the Museum was 'saved' in its Sydney city site in 2020, it is still unclear exactly what its future role is, or what its relationship will be with the proposed Parramatta venue. We want it to remain with its original purpose, on its current site, in its current buildings – albeit with appropriate renewal to better access the collection through exhibitions and related events.

Despite the Powerhouse Museum's website <https://www.maas.museum/powerhouse-renewal/> now identifying the historic Ultimo site as a location for exhibitions of 'applied arts and sciences' from the collection and beyond, rather than the controversially formerly cited museum of 'fashion and design', there remain many serious concerns. Some significant articles and news reports have documented recent research and serious issues. Read here!!

See: <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/news-chronology-2023-on/>

And: <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/letters-to-the-editor/>

And: <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/museum-plans-and-problems-into-2023/>

Refer overall to: <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/> including links to two long-term Inquiries!

Follow up with Members of Parliament and news reporters...??

The following notes are based on summaries of 8 years of research and documentation by many individuals as well as those in lobby groups including: the Powerhouse Museum Alliance; Save the Powerhouse Facebook; North Parramatta Residents Action group; Campaign to Save the Powerhouse and many others. These informed advocates for retaining the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo as a Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS), make the following points, and recommend that we continue to raise these with new **Premier, Chris Minns; Minister for Arts, John Graham; Minister for Heritage, Penny Sharpe**; and where appropriate in NSW, with our own **Local government members**. (See address links below.) Minister for Arts has already acknowledged understanding of the issues.

In making a submission, you may like to select from this list, issues of most concern to you and our wide audiences, and to elaborate on them.

- We call for a genuine renewal of the unique Powerhouse Museum, which must remain in Ultimo in the Sydney CBD, its home since 1893 and as the central site for the MAAS, as it is a state museum and must be accessible to a wide range of audiences. It must remain identified as a Museum.
- While a museum engages audiences in a range of stimulating ways, it must not be just a city-based arts pop-up or entertainment adjunct to the proposed 'Parramatta Powerhouse', currently under early construction on a site where a historic building was demolished.
- Responding to what regional Parramatta people are asking for, the 'Powerhouse Parramatta' should be reoriented in their location as a Parramatta Art Gallery, with a Parramatta Museum for its own notable history, as in other adjacent city centres.
- The Powerhouse Museum must be renewed as a Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, displaying and providing insightful information based on its collection, about science, engineering, transport, innovation, social history, decorative arts, crafts and design, across past to present. This is a unique combination of interconnecting collections.
- The government must cancel the \$500 million wasteful and destructive secret demolition plans for the potential 'Ultimo Creative Industries Precinct', where the Museum is being stripped largely of its collections and professional staff. These buildings include the most appropriate and safest spaces for significant large industrial and transport items, as well as extensive collections of smaller objects.
- As well as renewal of some facilities and spaces, the Museum also needs adequate continuing program funding, as well as for professional staff who have museum backgrounds and understand the collection and its audiences, to replace the many who are no longer employed.
- It is not at all clear who has made the current decisions: Museum senior management (how many have museum backgrounds; are they told what to do)? Board of Trustees (no museum members)? Create NSW government department? Arts Ministers in recent years? Who has been responsible?
- Their documents appear to be secret, and need exposing. They have ignored outcomes of two government Inquiries and several community consultation sessions. Any further work on the 'Powerhouse Ultimo' demolition and design scheme must be stopped until the new government has seen, and allowed public access to, all the design briefs and related decision-making documents.
- State Heritage Listing of the whole PHM Ultimo site (not just the old powerhouse buildings) is an urgent priority, and attention is drawn to the new government's agreement to seek release of heritage listing documents, secret design briefs and any agreements for the PHM at Ultimo, and the secret business cases for both Parramatta and Ultimo.
- Contrary to current design plans, along with the earlier historic buildings this renewal must retain, not demolish, the important 1988 Sulman award-winning buildings, of Wran building and galleria, and include them in state heritage listing.
- The adjacent historic Harwood tramshed building must also be heritage listed, and retained to continue its functions as an integral part of the PHM's history, design and project operations.
- Controversially, the entire collection has been removed to distant storage at Castle Hill, with concerns expressed about the danger of transportation for many items, and access for museum staff as well as audiences. Many collection and exhibition-based staff are being relocated there, and to Parramatta. Can we rely on such difficult access arrangements?

So – what is the Powerhouse Museum really heading for, and how can we contribute by passing on what we have experienced in the past and expect in the future?

If you want to write to our new government members, and ask/thank them for their expected support, go to:

Premier, Chris Minns; Minister for Arts, John Graham; and Minister for Heritage, Penny Sharpe; and where appropriate in NSW, with our own ***Local government members.***

(It is recommended we write a letter attached to an email, rather than just an email).

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/Pages/ministers.aspx>

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/Pages/all-members.aspx>

With regards – and many thanks,

Grace Cochrane

(Powerhouse Museum Alliance web and Facebook editor)