

<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/plibersek-city-of-sydney-enter-row-over-500m-powerhouse-redevelopment-20230513-p5d84v.html>

## Plibersek, City of Sydney enter row over \$500m Powerhouse redevelopment



By [Linda Morris](#)

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Prominent federal Labor minister Tanya Plibersek and the City of Sydney have weighed into the growing row over the future of the \$500 million redevelopment of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, upping pressure on the Minns government to hit pause on the knockdown rebuild of the museum's modern wing.

Plibersek, who is the sitting member for the seat of Sydney, said the NSW government needed to be sure the demolition plan it inherited for the museum was the "right thing to do" before proceeding.



Tanya Plibersek speaking at the Save the Powerhouse rally in 2015.

*CREDIT: FIONA MORRIS*

Plibersek was at the forefront of community rallies to save the Powerhouse at Ultimo seven years ago when it was to have been relocated to Parramatta, and the Ultimo site sold off.

She told this masthead: “I want to see the site maintained and restored so it can be enjoyed by future generations. Before the NSW government decides to approve the removal of any of its history, they need to be sure it’s the right thing to do.

“Heritage listing is a matter for the NSW government but I am glad the new minister is bringing transparency back to this process.”

Plibersek’s intervention lays the groundwork for a rethink of the redevelopment, which could involve a more modest refurbishment at a reduced cost to taxpayers. Savings could potentially be redirected to western Sydney arts including Parramatta’s Female Factory, an important site of Australia’s convict history.



The design of the new Powerhouse Ultimo by Durbach Block Jagers.

*CREDIT: COURTESY DBJ/THE POWERHOUSE*

The Minns government has yet to commit to the Powerhouse redevelopment and is consulting widely, including business groups that argue the redevelopment is needed to revive the Pyrmont precinct.

“Unfortunately, the Powerhouse forecourt on Harris Street has stood like a barren wasteland for far too long,” said Paul Nicolaou, executive director of Business Sydney. “The planned \$500 million investment is important for the whole Pyrmont precinct. Chinatown and its many wonderful businesses will benefit greatly from having a world-class museum nearby.”

On Monday night, the City of Sydney voted to call on NSW Arts Minister John Graham to review the project’s scope and all contractual obligations entered into by the previous Coalition government. Council also urged Graham to take “all possible steps” to ensure the heritage value of the site was respected and protected as part of any future scheme.

The motion was sponsored by Labor’s Linda Scott and supported by Lord Mayor Clover Moore, both of whom acknowledged the strength of local community opposition to the redevelopment. Scott said she was pleased a change of state government had ushered in a positive change of support for retaining the Powerhouse as a piece of critical cultural institution.

The near-unanimous vote effectively represents a hardening of Town Hall’s position on the redevelopment, which will reorient the museum’s entrance towards Haymarket and build a library annex along Harris Street, overnight accommodation for visiting regional students, and open six exhibition spaces.

The City of Sydney has previously supported the aims of the Powerhouse’s renewal while expressing reservations about the neighbourhood amenity, the size of the building envelope, and the adequacy of documentation around heritage.

A development application for the Powerhouse’s redevelopment is being finalised ahead lodgement.

The museum’s chief executive Lisa Havilah says the redevelopment is needed to expand exhibition spaces, mount and show travelling international exhibitions, and improve visitor experiences.

Controversy over the redevelopment reignited last month when [a draft report by eminent heritage architect Alan Croker](#) recommended significant parts of the modern extension be heritage protection.

Croker’s contract was terminated last year before he could deliver his preliminary findings. The government’s arts agency denied it was because of the report’s content.

The office of Arts Minister John Graham has been contacted for comment.