

18 July, 2023

Save the Powerhouse Facebook page refers to a letter written by architect, Lionel Glendenning, to new Arts Minister John Graham.

It says:

DISTINGUISHED PHM ARCHITECT SCORNS MINISTER'S "SAVED" CLAIM

Lionel Glendenning was the Architect who headed the internationally recognised conversion of the old Ultimo Power Station in 1988. As the “team leader” recommended by Prof. Hannah Lewi, Vice-President of Docomomo Australia, Glendenning has made his thoughts of the proposed “Renewal” abundantly clear in a recent letter to Minister John Graham. He is adamant, as we all are, that the Powerhouse Museum is NOT saved.

He said “The silence is deafening. After 9 years of public outcry, two Parliamentary Inquiries, extensive negative press, endless community and professional submissions, letters to Premiers and Ministers, protests and petitions, sham EIS consultations and surveys, dodgy DA’s and planning approvals, it is simply ridiculous that the Powerhouse Museum is not ‘saved’ as claimed on 4 July 2020 by the former government... The People’s Museum is not a political toy to be played with by any government...

He continued “Over a month ago I wrote to you proposing as discussed...Powerhouse Redux- a straightforward, lower cost renewal of the highly significant Powerhouse Museum. The proposed strategic, sequential, new interventions, exhibitions and renewals will relaunch the Powerhouse Museum, including the essential Harwood Building, as the world renowned and cutting edge Museum which it has been for nigh on 30 years. Furthermore this Redux program, including long delayed maintenance and restitution, can be done without closing the Museum.

The Big Lie promulgated by proponents of PHM demolition is that Ultimo is not ‘fit for purpose’ –a strange Freudian slip by those who are developing a 10-storey non-museum building on a flood prone site with only a small component of “presentation” spaces. The Powerhouse Museum has 16,000 sq. metres of exhibition space to international standard. Instead, the Museum is to be substantially stripped and demolished to become an arts, fashion and performance precinct within 5kms of three contemporary arts complexes...add to these the (two) privately funded contemporary arts venues...

My involvement with the Master Planning process was cited in Budget Estimates, but in fact I was not involved in any meaningful or effective way. Hence I formally withdrew from the sham consultation as other professionals had. I note that I am the Architect of Record for the multi award-winning, internationally recognised Powerhouse Museum, and I have Copyright and Moral Rights in the concepts, design and architecture of the Powerhouse Museum which includes the Harwood Building - the former Ultimo Tram Depot.

At our inconclusive meeting with you, the Design Brief for the Harris Street architectural abomination, was sought as was the Business Case, the secret document referencing the Baird government...justifying the presumptive decision gazumping of Council’s plan for the Parramatta river site.

Neither promise has been fulfilled some 2 months later by you Is this the new Labor, or is it business as usual from a quasi-Liberal government after promising at the election there would be no demolition of the Powerhouse Museum.

I began this letter with “silence is deafening” and now find that this whole absurd episode in the 143 years old life of the great people’s Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Ultimo continues under your administration!”

We all agree that after a decade of stating the obvious – that the Powerhouse Renewal is enormously wasteful, universally unpopular and that it will result in a major degradation of public assets – it is incomprehensible that it could still go ahead.

