

FACT SHEET: The Powerhouse Museum 'move', Issue 8, 26 February 2023

On a single sheet, this document summarises the evidence that the NSW Government's plans for museum organisational changes in Paramatta and Ultimo are flawed to such an extent that democratic norms are being constantly circumvented. We submitted to the Department of Planning and Environment that the process is so negligent that State Significant Development status should not be awarded to the proposed changes to THE Powerhouse MUSEUM at Ultimo but this has been ignored in the granting of the SSD status for the project (see <https://pp.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/powerhouse-ultimo-renewal>). References can be found for most matters on the Powerhouse Museum Alliance website, <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/what-the-experts-say/the-facts-about-the-powerhouse-museum-move-tom-lockley/>. Other references can be provided on request, email tomlockley@gmail.com. As always, since these fact sheets were first developed and circulated in 2017, all Government responses will be publicised, and if necessary, corrections of fact will be immediately issued. So far, no evidence of errors has been advanced. **We submit that the project should be immediately stopped and subjected to proper independent examination.**

Recent developments: The CMP / EIS 'consultations' 2022, new round of 'consultations' announced last week:

There have been several major 'consultations' regarding this project since 2017, and typically, input has been misleadingly reported. This is outlined more fully elsewhere, but on this occasion, we had undertakings that the process would be properly carried out: the consultations would proceed according to the steps of the Burra Charter, the process would be accurately reported, that this would lead to a Conservation Management Plan and that the CMP would inform the design brief for the work to be done at THE Powerhouse MUSEUM.

Nevertheless, a 567-page Conservation Management Plan was released on 21 July. Obviously, it had been worked on for at least several months, and the public consultation input was a negligible factor in its development. At no time was there any recommendation, or even support, in the consultation process for such ideas as removing the Wran building or demolishing the Steam Revolution display. None of the published submissions support this type of action.

We are told that 'the 1988 adaptive re-use of the Power House Buildings into the Powerhouse Museum, including the construction of the Wran Building, further obscured rather than enhanced the industrial history of the site'. (CMP 5.3.1). This completely ignores the overwhelming support for the museum and the 1988 conversions expressed by the general public as well as by people with museum qualifications and experience.

Far from being a conservation management plan for the preservation of the remains of THE world-class Powerhouse MUSEUM, this document effectively sanctions its destruction. Since July, a design brief was prepared and issued to selected architects, and a 'winner' has been chosen, (12 December 2022) but the public is still denied access to all relevant documents as they are claimed to be 'confidential' (letter from Ms Pitman, Create NSW, 20 January 2023).

A new round of 'consultations' is currently being widely publicised. Yet the publicity picture itself demonstrates that the decision to demolish the 1988 additions has been made, and we also hear that the original Powerhouse buildings will be stripped out. The Government plans to close the museum at the end of this year. It will reopen as a 'creative industries hub' with an 'emphasis on fashion and design' with some temporary museum displays sometime in the future. The Government is presenting these decisions as a 'done deal'. No public input, including the 2022 EIS / CMP consultations, has recommended, or even supported, the destruction of the 1988 museum conversion.

Here is a summary of other fundamental planning deficiencies that we have documented throughout:

Alternatives were never properly investigated for the laudable aim of increasing cultural facilities centred on Parramatta. No significant expert input was involved regarding this basic aim. There was no consultation on basic issues with any significant stakeholders. These deficiencies have persisted over the eight years since the basic announcement. The Government has imposed excessive secrecy and taken special non-democratic measures to avoid following due process. A particular issue is the declaration of the 'base case' as the Government's decision to relocate the Powerhouse Museum – approximately mid-2018: this needs to be explained in terms of legality and democratic process. The opposition to the project expressed by the general public and the museum and arts community is unprecedented. However, their reasoned, evidence-based criticisms and two comprehensive Legislative Council Inquiry reports have been treated with contempt. The financial aspects of the project have been very badly managed, and the waste of taxpayers' money is enormous. The cost benefits of heritage aspects of the Ultimo museum have been ignored. By restricting the heritage listing to the original powerhouse buildings the heritage value of the bicentennial museum conversion has not been accounted for, and the informed opinion is that this is not valid. Though the initial plans have been modified and the situation has improved, the autocratic decision-making process persists, with consequent ongoing problems. More details are given overleaf.

1. **Alternatives were not investigated.** There is near-universal support for the improvement of cultural facilities, particularly at Parramatta, the centre of population of Greater Sydney. The idea of moving the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta was suggested for 'urgent investigation' in Government-sponsored documents in 2014. Clearly, this investigation was not properly done, eg not by Ms Macgregor, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, as was claimed by the Government. Infrastructure NSW, the relevant Governmental body, has clearly stated that its involvement follows from the Government's decision: it did not conduct any investigation of alternatives.
2. **Expert museum advice was not involved in the fundamental decision.** There is no evidence of input from any relevant expert, any museum / arts peak body, any of the local government authorities, or any other cultural group.
3. **There was no consultation with stakeholders before the November 2014 announcement:** Trustees and Parramatta council read it in the newspapers. The elected council had on several occasions requested that the Government's chosen site be reserved for open space, but this was ignored by the Government.
4. **These deficiencies have persisted throughout.** At no time has a Government-sponsored group containing people with relevant expertise examined alternatives to the 'move' – If this had been done this project would never have been considered, eg for reasons mentioned in paragraph 9.
5. Treasury document [tpp08-5](#) (2008) required that for all major projects, the **base case** (the status quo) should be described, and then the alternatives for achieving the stated aim, (obviously to improve the cultural facilities of the Parramatta area) should be considered. **The Government sidestepped these requirements by declaring (in mid-2018) that the base case was the Government's autocratic decision to move the museum.** The public clamour to retain key elements, eg Wran Building and the steam gallery, has been ignored. This has resulted in the farcical situation where, eg, the NSW National Trust has constantly and repeatedly expressed reasoned opposition to the entire project but this has been ignored in reporting NT's reaction to the 'move'.
6. **Governmental Secrecy** has been extreme, claiming 'Cabinet in confidence' to avoid releasing basic information, eg re the business case, the data used to form the business case, and even the terms of reference for people providing data to the people designing the business case. Even the fire regulations which allegedly underpinned the need for the removal of the massive structures from Ultimo level 1 in March 2021 have not been released!
7. **Opposition to the 'move' has been enormous** (eg the massive *Save the Powerhouse* Facebook site established in March 2015, the full page advertisements of 17 February 2016). At the massive first *Inquiry into museums and galleries* (23/6/2017 to 17/7/2019), support for the 'move' was almost non-existent, apart from Government instrumentalities and a few submissions from Western Sydney business lobby groups. The consequent final report made a fully documented Finding that due process had not been followed and several recommendations. Surveys have consistently demonstrated overwhelming support for the Ultimo museum.
8. **The Government rejected the first Legislative Council Inquiry finding** in a brief statement (17/7/2019) that proper governance had been assured by a peer review group and six independent review panels - a statement largely recycled from the Business Case Summary of April 2017. The Peer Review process has been comprehensively shown to be non-existent, and the Government divulged no information about the review panels. The findings and recommendations of the second legislative council inquiry (17/2/2020 to 30/9/2022) have been treated with similar contempt, and the Government response is seen **as another denial of due process.**
9. **Plans for financing the 'move' have been irresponsible.** It was first claimed that the Ultimo site would be sold for urban development to fund the new museum in Parramatta, with the surplus used for arts purposes within the Parramatta area. This was supported by 'studies', eg by Deloitte, but was ridiculous: the cost of removing and storing Ultimo exhibits and demolishing the museum would absorb any proceeds of the land sale (\$250 million maximum). The latest 'official' cost for the project is \$849 million, but museum experts put the cost at around \$1.5 billion. The latest proposal enables the destruction of the award-winning 1988 Powerhouse MUSEUM and rebuilding it at a net cost of \$500 million when \$250 million would return it to world-class standard. The decision to demolish and rebuild the Willow Grove building at Parramatta is, again, not backed by any proper costing process and the informed opinion is that proper reconstruction will be prohibitively expensive. This is also relevant to the next section.
10. **Heritage aspects of the 'move' have been overlooked.** The repurposing of the powerhouse buildings was a highlight of the bicentennial celebrations of 1988 and achieved worldwide recognition. The attachment of the community to both the Ultimo building and the heritage buildings at Parramatta is clear, and well-founded: these are marvellous historic buildings. Even if this does not weigh with the decision-makers, **there is a clear and considerable monetary value engendered by heritage factors**, which has been completely overlooked. The 2020 Government-sponsored recommendation of heritage assessment of the Ultimo buildings was restricted to the basic structure of the original Powerhouse, thereby precluding discussion of the overall museum as a heritage item, and leading to the ridiculous assertion that the site had no *persons or group of persons with which the building is associated ... and is important for its associations with an identifiable group ... at a local level only.*

FACT SHEET: The Powerhouse Museum 'move' (September 2021)

This document presents evidence that the NSW Government's plans for museum organisational changes in Paramatta and Ultimo are flawed to such an extent that democratic norms are being constantly circumvented. These are the basic matters on which factual evidence is advanced, supporting the above:

Alternatives were never properly investigated. No significant expert input was involved. There was no consultation on basic issues with any significant stakeholders. These deficiencies have persisted over the nearly seven years since the basic announcement. The Government has imposed excessive secrecy and taken special non-democratic measures to avoid following due process. The opposition to the project expressed by the general public and the and museum and arts community is unprecedented. However their reasoned, evidence based criticisms and the comprehensive Legislative Council Inquiry report have been treated with contempt. The financial aspects of the project have been very badly managed and the waste of taxpayers money is enormous. The heritage aspects of the whole move are relevant here. Though the initial plans have been modified and the situation has improved, the autocratic decision-making process persists, with consequent ongoing problems

A fully referenced copy of this sheet can be found at <https://maasbusinesscase.com/factsheet> (private website). It also contains details of terminology used and expert checking of the facts stated. As always, since these fact sheets were first developed and circulated in 2017, all Government responses will be publicised, and if necessary, corrections of fact will be immediately issued. So far, no evidence of errors has been found in previous fact sheet versions . **The remainder of this sheet is a brief summary of the deficiencies of the Government's administration of this process:**

- 1. Alternatives were not investigated.** There is near-universal support for the general improvement of cultural facilities, particularly at Parramatta, the centre of population of Greater Sydney. The idea of moving the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta was first suggested in documents such as *State Infrastructure Strategy Update 2014 Recommendations to the NSW Government November 2014*, seeking 'urgent investigation' of the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta, but it seems clear that this investigation was ever done. Government sources claim that Ms Macgregor, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, conducted an appropriate study, but this has never been released. There is thus no record of any competent examination of alternatives, either before the initial of the 'move' (26/11/2014) or since. Infrastructure NSW, the relevant body, has clearly stated that its involvement 'takes as its starting point the Government's decision to locate the Powerhouse Museum on the Riverbank site in Parramatta' . It did not conduct any investigation of alternatives..
- 2. Expert assistance was not involved in the fundamental decision.** Advice given by Ms Macgregor is secret, and its validity is therefore unknown, but she has said that the main people with whom she spoke was the Western Sydney Arts and Cultural Lobby, who gave only limited support and seem to be no longer functioning. There is no evidence of input from any relevant expert, any museum / arts peak body, any of the local government authorities of the area, or any other cultural group.. 37 major cultural institutions of the area were not consulted in any way. Mr Borger, of the then Western Sydney branch of the Sydney Business Chamber seems to have had significant input, but his expertise is in other fields. His business judgement also seems to be questionable, see paragraph 8.
- 3. No consultation occurred with stakeholders before the announcement,** as exemplified by the fact that the Museum trustees and the Parramatta city council were not even informed of the decision before it was announced.
- 4. These deficiencies have persisted over the nearly seven years since the basic announcement.** See paragraph 5 for comments on consultation. At no time has a Government-sponsored group containing people with relevant expertise examined alternatives. If there had been appropriate examination of alternatives, this project would never have been considered, eg for reasons mentioned in paragraph 9. Involvement of museum people at all significant levels seems to have been minimal: the demolition (March 2021) of the massive display structures on level 1 at Ultimo was certainly not done to recognised museum standards. The Trustees' only known requirements (1/10.2016) were for the Parramatta museum to use the whole site, with no commercial encumbrances, and be of at least the scale and scope of Ultimo with sufficient funding for the 'move' and running of the museum. Beginning January 2019, we sought confirmation from Professor Glover that these conditions had been met, but he passed responsibility for the answer to a MAAS executive officer, who did not respond before his departure from MAAS a year later. Professor Glover again did not respond when asked if his conditions had been met at his retirement announcement (November 2020)
- 5. Treasury document tpp08-5 (2008) clearly sets out the need for all major projects to evaluate the base case** (the situation that would obtain if a proposed development did not occur) and then to evaluate the alternatives for achieving the stated aim, which in this case should simply be to improve the cultural facilities of the Parramatta area. These requirements were strengthened in TPP18-06 of 2017, particularly when considered in conjunction

with TPP18-05, Government Commissioning and Contestability Policy. (20i6) **The Government has completely sidestepped these requirements by declaring the base case to be the Government's decision to move the museum. This special measure avoids following due process** as all consultation has been only on what the public wants at the Parramatta facility and at any retained cultural facility at Ultimo. This has resulted in the farcical situation where, for example, the NSW National Trust has constantly and repeatedly expressed reasoned opposition to the entire project but this has been entirely ignored in reporting their reaction to the 'move'. Another case study is the acquisition of the riverside land for the Parramatta facility. The elected Parramatta Council had consistently supported the retention of this area as open space, but was controlled by a Government-appointed administrator due to forced council amalgamations (12/5/2016- 23/10/2019). 68 days before the end of the tenure of the caretaker administrator the deal was completed 'as a matter of urgency'. The Government's statements that the elected council supported the 'move' are manifestly wrong, but this fact has not been acknowledged by the Government, despite clear evidence brought to their attention. The deal has been ratified by the re-elected council, but by a narrow margin, reportedly from fear of offending the Government. Yet another ramification is seen in the recent Land and Environment Court judgement on the future of Willow Grove, where the judgement specifically ignored discussion of the merit of the Government's plans for the site vacated by this heritage building.

6. Secrecy has been a major feature of the Government's actions. The lay understanding of 'cabinet in confidence' secrecy is that decisions taken by Cabinet are taken in secret, then supported by the whole group. The Government has used this mantra repeatedly, avoiding releasing basic information, eg the business case, the data used to form the business case and even the terms of reference for people providing data to the people designing the business case. Even the details of the fire regulations which allegedly underpinned the need for removal of the massive structures from level 1 in March 2021 have not been released, despite requests.

7. Opposition to the 'move' has been enormous *Inter alia*, full page advertisements were sponsored by notable people and a large grass-roots movement was backed by *Save the Powerhouse* Facebook site. This culminated in the massive first *Inquiry into museums and galleries* (23/6/2017 to 17 July 2019). Support for the 'move' was scant: apart from Government instrumentalities, the only submissions favourable to the move came from Mr Borger's organisation and the Tourism and Transport forum, a minor lobby group associated with Mr Brown of the *Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue*, another business lobby group business interests. The consequent final report made a fully documented Finding that due process had not been followed, and several consequent recommendations. Numerous surveys have resulted in overwhelming support for retaining the Ultimo museum.

8. The Government rejected the first Inquiry finding in a brief statement (17/7/2009) that proper governance had been assured by a peer review group and six independent review panels in a statement recycled from the Business Case Summary of April 2017. The Peer Review process has been comprehensively shown to be non-existent, and all the Government will tell us about the review panels is the month in which they were held. In view of the serious criticisms levelled against this project this response is seen by many **as another denial of due process**.

9. Plans for financing the 'move' have been irresponsible. The original proposal was that the Ultimo site would be sold for urban development which would fund the new museum in Parramatta, with any surplus used for arts purposes within the Parramatta area. This was supported by studies by professional consultancy groups, eg the Deloitte document *Building Western Sydney's Cultural Arts Economy* (2015) sponsored by Sydney Business Chamber (Western Sydney) and still being quoted in 2021 by Mr Borger. This was soon shown to be ridiculous: the cost of removing and storing Ultimo exhibits and demolishing the museum would absorb any proceeds of land sale (\$250 million maximum). The latest 'official' cost for the project is \$849 million, but museum experts put the cost at around \$1.5 billion. The idea of moving the large objects to Parramatta was far more expensive than any other cultural project: they would have to be last out of Ultimo and first into Parramatta, with consequent delays and huge cost, exacerbated by the need to insert the objects at the first floor level as shown in the design. Another example of financial responsibility is the decision to demolish and rebuild the Willow Grove building at Parramatta: it appears that this is another hurried Governmental decision not backed by any proper costing process and the informed opinion is that proper reconstruction will be prohibitively expensive. This is also relevant to the next section.

0. Heritage aspects of the 'move' have been overlooked. The repurposing of the powerhouse buildings was a highlight of the bicentennial celebrations of 1988, and achieved world-wide recognition. The attachment of the community for both the Ultimo building and the heritage buildings at Parramatta is clear, and well-founded: these are marvellous historic buildings. Even if this does not weigh with the decision-makers, **there is a clear and considerable monetary value engendered by heritage factors**, which has been completely overlooked. The 2020 recommendation of heritage assessment of the Pyrmont buildings was restricted to the basic structure of the original Powerhouse, thereby precluding discussion of the overall museum as a heritage item, and leading to the ridiculous assertion that site had no *persons or group of persons with which the building is associated ... and is important for its associations with an identifiable group ... at a local level only*.