

Sydney's Powerhouse Museum announces new plans to shut for 3 years

[CITY HUB](#) [CITY NEWS](#) [NEWS](#)

GRACE JOHNSON

DECEMBER 4, 2023



Image: Sarah Aktag, Shutterstock

by GRACE JOHNSON

Sydney's Powerhouse Museum will be shut for 3 years as the government undertakes \$250 million worth of building and conservation work.

Arts Minister John Graham announced the plans on Monday and showed updated concept design plans for the science, technology, arts and design spaces in the Ultimo museum. The museum will close its doors from February 5, 2024.

Mr Graham said, "This is the next step in the process of reimagining the future of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo." "After 9 years of divided opinions of this site, we are hopeful these new designs and a renewed focus on applied arts and sciences are more in line with the community's expectations of this much-loved institution."

The announcement comes after the Minns government was heavily criticised for halving the rebuild allocation, which was originally \$500 million. The rest of the funds will be going towards schools and hospitals.

In addition, the museum has been caught up in almost 9 years of controversy regarding plans for its relocation, demolition and development. The former government initially planned to demolish and rebuild the museum in favour of a fashion, events and commercial precinct. The decision was reversed in 2020 due to public pressure to keep the museum and its beloved collection together.

In [a blog entry on CultureHeist](#), published ahead of the government announcement, Judith White wrote that the plan was "part of the disastrous acceleration of the corporatisation of the arts and culture sector."

“Revitalisation” plans

The new Powerhouse Museum will include an outdoor space and a reoriented entrance facing the Goods Line, the walkway connecting Central Station to Haymarket. It will also showcase the heritage facades of the original power station built in 1899.

The concept design also includes plans to build accommodation for regional school children in NSW to visit the museum and participate in learning programs.

The government is hoping that the design will provide improved flow of visitors and exhibition spaces, supporting increased access to the Powerhouse collection, once the museum reopens.

Powerhouse Chief Executive Lisa Haviilah said, “The heritage revitalisation of Powerhouse Ultimo will ensure that there will be even more opportunities for our audiences to connect with and experience our collection and programs across the applied arts and applied sciences.”

“It’s just PR and no substance”

But *Save the Powerhouse* community group considers the announcement to be the same problem, just reworded and repackaged.

Leaders of the group Patricia Johnson and Jean-Pierre Alexandre spoke to *City Hub*, saying “It’s broken promises.”

“The government has announced at least three times that the Powerhouse is saved. And if you scratch that, you find that it is not saved at all. It’s the same.”

“It’s repackaging. It’s a pure PR exercise each time. Perrottet called it renewal, now they’re calling it revitalisation.”

“It’s just PR and no substance.”

Furthermore, the group is totally opposed to the closure of the museum.

The state government has claimed that a temporary closure will incur less costs, reduce the disruption period, and minimise the chances of a “compromised” visitor experience.

“But what is more disturbing than being closed?” asked Mr Alexandre.

Ms Johnson said, “People who, like us perhaps, brought their grandchildren on Sunday afternoons to enjoy and be educated at the Powerhouse Museum will no longer be able to do so, and they will forget.”

“The CEO, Lisa Haviilah, fails to understand the traditional and genuine meaning of the word ‘museum’,” she added.

ONE RESPONSE TO “SYDNEY’S POWERHOUSE MUSEUM ANNOUNCES NEW PLANS TO SHUT FOR 3 YEARS”

1. **JENNIFER SANDERS**
December 4, 2023 at 7:18 PM

Totally agree with the Save the Powerhouse Community group. The Labor government is delivering the LNP plan with minimal tweaks to try to hide the destruction of this 143 year old museum. The essential Harwood Building is excluded so will no longer be the best practice museum collection storage and operations centre. Instead it will be a developers’ dream with maximum height for floors of student housing, residential – whatever brings in the \$. The signature Steam Revolution will be taken down and Transport, and Space will disappear although all are popular with families and students. They’ll be replaced by vacuous events and inconsequential artist projects raiding the valuable collection to prop up their rambling thoughts and feelings.