

Powerhouse heritage listing guarantees Museum's future in Ultimo

Published: 16 September 2024

Released by: Minister for the Arts

Powerhouse Museum Ultimo has had its heritage listing broadened, guaranteeing that the much-loved site will remain a museum of applied arts and sciences into the future. The 145-year-old institution and its collection has evolved from its inception in 1879 in the Garden Palace inside the Botanic Gardens, to the Agricultural Hall in the Domain, the Technological Museum in Harris Street and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences housed in the former Ultimo Power House.

It is the custodian of over 500,000 objects across the applied arts and sciences. This is one of the finest and most diverse museum collections in Australia, most of it held at any one time in the Museum's state of the art storage facility at Castle Hill.

The Powerhouse Museum's guiding principles, to 'effectively minister to the needs and demands of the community in any or all branches of applied science and art and the development of industry', were set by the legislation of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Act 1945.

The Powerhouse Heritage Revitalisation will make the Museum far more welcoming to visitors. While undertaking needed restoration to the century-old buildings, it will also reorient the Museum's main entrance to make it more accessible to the public. A dramatic new garden square will enable entry from the now pedestrianised Darling Harbour Goods Line, providing easy connection with Haymarket, Railway Square, Central Station and other surrounding precincts.

The refurbishment is compatible with the heritage listing and will enable the Museum to present a new and vigorous exhibition program across a wide spectrum of the applied arts and applied sciences.

The heritage listing includes:

- The 1899 Boiler House, the 1902 Turbine Hall and the 1988 Wran building: 7,500 sq/m of exhibition spaces (increased from 6,850sq/m) will provide more opportunity to present exclusive international exhibitions and programs.
- The 1988 Galleria, which will be refurbished to exhibition and programming grade.
- The 1926 Switch House, which will become the new entrance from the Goods Line.
- The 1899 Ultimo Tram Depot (The Harwood Building), which will continue to be used for museum operations including conservation laboratories, workshops and staff offices.
- The 1901 former Ultimo Post Office will be designated for community and programming use, particularly to support the affiliated societies.
- The 1898 – 1901 underground water-cooling system and manifold will be preserved and continue to be utilised.

- and the Harris Street forecourt which will be revitalised as central meeting place and garden.

A Reference Group for Ultimo has been established to ensure the success of the heritage revitalisation project. Chaired by former Wran and Carr Government Minister, Bob Debus, the group serves as an important link between stakeholders, the museum and the project team. It will provide advice on the design and implementation of the revitalisation project and the development of programs for the museum's reopening.

New exhibition spaces will provide more opportunity to present exclusive international exhibitions and programs.

Additional areas at the Ultimo site will be dedicated to education and learning programs, enabling the Museum to create live-in, immersive education experiences for students of all ages.

Upgraded arrangements for visitor circulation will substantially improve visitor experience and increase the use of the Museum by the community.

Restoration and construction work is expected to be completed in 2027. The allocated budget for the project is \$300 million, with a \$250 million contribution coming from the NSW Government and \$50 million through the Powerhouse Museum's philanthropy campaign.

Minister for the Arts John Graham said:

"Through its ability to bring the arts, design, science and technology and their history together, the Powerhouse Museum plays a critical role in the engagement of the community with contemporary ideas and issues.

"As outlined in the 1945 Act, the Powerhouse Museum has a responsibility to preserve significant objects to educate, inform and inspire the public and future generations. It also has an obligation to engage with and support industries across the applied arts and applied sciences."

Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo Heritage Revitalisation Reference Group Chair Bob Debus AM said:

"Across the six buildings that make up the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo, and within the Museum's 500,000 objects, there is extraordinary heritage. In celebrating and preserving our heritage the Powerhouse Museum also has an obligation to continue to evolve.

"The buildings, curation and programming should continue to reflect contemporary issues, while reflecting on the past."

Powerhouse Museum Ultimo Chief Executive Lisa Havilah said:

"The heritage revitalisation will enable the Powerhouse Museum to continue connecting the communities of NSW with the applied arts and sciences through our iconic collection." "Once reopened the Powerhouse will have more and vastly improved museum exhibition spaces, circulation spaces that will create a wonderful experience for our audiences and revitalised buildings that will protect and enhance the presentation of the Powerhouse Collection."

Heritage NSW Executive Director Sam Kidman said:

"The expanded heritage listing of the Powerhouse Museum Complex reaffirms its significance as a cultural landmark in NSW. This amendment ensures that the architectural and historical significance of the entire Powerhouse Museum Complex is recognised and protected. An integral part of our state's cultural and educational heritage, the Powerhouse Museum Complex is, and will continue to be, an iconic cultural institution for the people of NSW."