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## The Powerhouse Ultimo revamp has been approved – but the wait's not over

By [Megan Gorrey](#) and [Linda Morris](#)

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Work is due to start on the NSW government's controversial \$300 million rebuild of the Powerhouse at Ultimo within months after nearly a decade of false starts, protests and a parliamentary inquiry.

But visitors face a wait to visit the revamped museum, which will probably not be completed until 2027 at the earliest.



The government says the plans will reorient the museum to connect with the CBD by creating a public square at the northern end of The Goods Line. *Credit:Artist's impression*

Planning and Public Spaces Minister Paul Scully has granted approval to demolish staircases, internal walls and mezzanines within the Boiler House, Engine House, Power House and Turbine Hall, and build shopfronts along Harris Street and a new city-facing entrance and courtyard.

Scully said the redesign would improve exhibition spaces and was a “world-class example of adaptive heritage reuse that will breathe new life into the museum”.

“With a new entrance and an active Harris Street facade, the museum will continue to make its presence known in the Ultimo precinct,” Scully said.

The approval is a step towards construction starting in mid-2025, more than 12 months after the applied arts and sciences museum shuttered its home of 35 years on Harris Street in February 2024.

The former Coalition government’s policy to shift the Powerhouse to Parramatta sparked a wave of opposition and nine years of fractious debate. A parliamentary inquiry [scrutinised the \\$1.5 billion proposal](#) in 2020.

In 2023, the Minns Labor government scrapped a \$500 million rebuild of the museum, opting instead for “heritage revitalisation”, which will retain the Wran building’s curved roof. The government said it would create “new and improved exhibition spaces” designed to meet international museum standards while “conserving and restoring the original heritage of the site”.

The overwhelming majority of more than 250 public submissions on the proposal were negative.



An artist’s impression of the revamped building from Macarthur Street into the internal courtyard. *Credit: Durbach Block Jagers & Architectus*

Former Powerhouse trustee Kylie Winkworth said it was an “ill-conceived, wasteful and destructive assault on the heritage and assets of a major state museum that has been in Ultimo since 1893”.

“The secret purpose of the Powerhouse Ultimo revitalisation project is not museum renewal but demolition and downsizing to change the use of the site from museum exhibitions and education to performance, parties, venue hire and creative industries.”

Consultant Ethos Urban's response to the submissions did not directly dispute claims the renovations would shrink net dedicated exhibition floor space by 75 per cent.

It said: "Rather than focusing solely on quantitative metrics, such as net floor space, the proposal represents qualitative improvements in clarity, circulation and the ability of redesigned spaces to effectively showcase exhibits."

The closure of the Ultimo building left the museum without a permanent shopfront until its new \$915 million headquarters is due to open in Parramatta in late 2026.

In September, the government said restoration and construction work was expected to be completed in 2027. A spokesman said on Wednesday the timeframe would be finalised with the construction partners, who would be confirmed soon.

The contract will be awarded to one of three companies: John Holland, Lendlease or Richard Crookes Construction. The project was designed by Durbach Block Jagers with Architectus, Youssofzay + Hart and landscape architects Tyrell Studio.