

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-powerhouse-museum-has-been-failed-by-broken-promises-20260906-p60usd.html>

[Following: **Linda Morris** ("[Secret plan to sell off Powerhouse building](#)", September 5)]

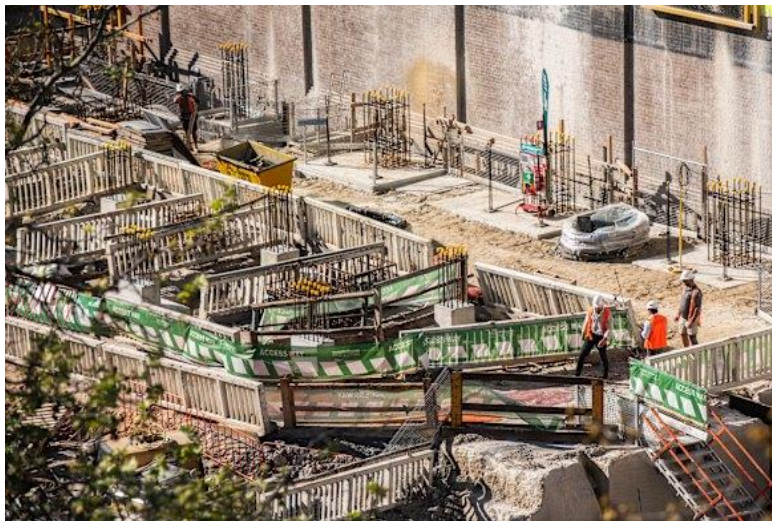
SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

LETTERS September 6, 2026 (In print 7 Sept)

The Powerhouse Museum has been failed by broken promises

Linda Morris unravels years of backroom deals regarding the Powerhouse Museum ("[Secret plan to sell off Powerhouse building](#)", September 5), reporting that "A government spokesman said Labor was committed to the Powerhouse Museum, including the Wran Building's reopening in Ultimo." The promise made by Arts Minister John Graham in March 2023, that the Powerhouse Museum was to be revitalised for \$300 million, was never going to happen. It has also been confirmed that the interior of the old Powerhouse is now just an empty shell. What appears to have been swept under the carpet is that after 2020, when the Powerhouse was "saved", millions were spent by the previous government in converting the Discovery Centre in Castle Hill into a mega-warehouse. Its purpose, to absorb the objects in the Powerhouse Museum, including the contents of the Harwood Building. A long time ago, the backroom declared that the Harwood Building had no historic significance and will eventually be not fit for purpose. Is it any wonder that, as Morris' article reports, "Public Works is now undertaking a preliminary commercial assessment of the Harwood site's market value"?

Garry Horvai, Pennant Hills



Construction works at the Powerhouse Ultimo site. Once was a museum Steven Siewert

How are we back to this stage, where once again they're looking into selling of parts of the Powerhouse? Experts warned the government for years and years that this plan was going to be a costly disaster. Now the museum lies in ruins, stripped of its heritage and iconic features, and once again there's talk of a sell-off. Sacking the executives is too little too late, unless these sackings are just the government giving the public someone to blame. To fulfil the election promise to save the Powerhouse, that needed to have been done as soon as the government got in. Was it just demolition by stealth all along? **Thomas Walder, Cherrybrook**

The community should not have to suffer because of mismanagement and overreach by Powerhouse Museum overseers. The Harwood building is essential to the heritage values of the Ultimo site. It's time to strip back the expensive and unnecessary artist studios and accommodation to bring us a museum filled with design and technology collections, interactives and ideas.

Judith Coombes, Lilyfield

The plan was never a secret. From the moment “developers” saw a nice little earner in the under-used Ultimo area, the writing was on the wall. Start by (literally) cutting off the bridge and monorail so no one could get there, then defund so that there was less to see and less working for those who did. Next cut the staff by a third, chiefly us educators and the curators who made it welcoming (funny how no directors or marketing got cut, at least until recently), then knock down a 30-year-old perfectly functional building during the holidays before it can be heritage listed. Finally, build a vote-buying white elephant in a politically useful area, filling it with overseas artists, and just before you open magically discover a bunch of problems to give you an excuse to sell the original much-loved Powerhouse to an overseas company that will never pay tax for building the gimcrack little boxy investment apartments no one will live in. This was always the plan, the only secret is who can we vote for to stop it happening?

Allan Kreuter, Roseville

One of Gladys Berejiklian's pet projects for Sydney, most of which involved demolition of anything initiated during the premiership of Neville Wran, was the removal of the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo. Enquiries to her office revealed the “desperate need” for inner-city housing. One could be certain that there were also potential sales of land to “desperate developers” with ready cash for the government's balance sheet. Overseas, prime museums are usually in a city's central area, in easy reach of tourists and locals. There is nothing wrong with having a branch in Parramatta, but the title of “Powerhouse” is meaningless. From all reports, it seems to be a riverside entertainment facility. Careful thought went into turning an old tramway powerhouse and its associated tram shed into a technological museum. The main area could have been less of a black maze, but that would have been easily remedied. The buildings could have been redone for a fraction of the current cost blowouts, but like the stadia and other “look at me” projects, cost seemed to be of no concern at that time. The point being next to the tram shed was not lost in the original plans for the museum, and Chris Minns should not remove this significance nor reduce this museum to a meaningless shell. **Donald Hawes, Peel**



The Powerhouse Museum in its glory days Kate Geraghty

I don't think too many of us are surprised at the sudden reveal about selling off the Ultimo Powerhouse building. Several years ago, when the move to Parramatta was announced, that was my first thought. A nice little earner for the government, with only the taxpayers and tourists the losers.
Margaret Grove, Concord

In 2015, I joined the phalanx of *Herald* letter writers demanding the Powerhouse be saved. Thanks in part, perhaps, to this expression of collective outrage, the Baird government backed down, proving a victory for the people and for common sense. Or so we thought. The time has come to remind the Minns government that nothing has changed and broken promises, regretful hand wringing and economic rationalism won't cut it. Sydney's shameful track record of demolishing its heritage in the name of shiny, commercial progress, in effect locked glass boxes, stops here. The Ultimo Powerhouse, formerly a real-life powerhouse, is the ideal setting, location and drawcard to exhibit our proud technological, scientific and cultural history on a human scale. Every great city has a similar institution to complete its cultural identity, and the Powerhouse, a diamond in our cultural crown, was conditionally removed to clean and polish under the firm understanding of its full restoration. **Peter Farmer, Northbridge**

What a mess the entire Powerhouse museum saga has become. The plan was always to sell this prime property to developers. This museum of the people and by the people was perfect as it was. Great site, wonderful displays and interesting for all. A Sydney gem. Some bright spark has decided it needs to be sold. Like privatisation, this is like selling off the most worthwhile, valuable assets. Like selling off prime defence holdings, this will come back to bite the government.

Ashley Berry, Toolijooa

I have written letters to the *Herald* about the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum, three in 2023 and one in 2025. As with dozens (or possibly hundreds) of other letter writers who wrote in about the fate of this once-amazing establishment, I have watched with impotence and sorrow as it has systematically been destroyed. Now I read there is an \$80 million budget overrun on the Ultimo rebuild. I am not at all surprised, but I am deeply saddened that incompetence, overreach and egotism have ruined the chances of this museum returning to anywhere near its former glory. So many experts and passionate supporters begged for the Powerhouse to be restored rather than redeveloped and now can only say, "We told you so." **Margot Vaccari, Berowra**

Was this Sydney's worst kept secret? **Brian Collins, Cronulla**