

# SAVING THE POWERHOUSE

The Pyrmont History Group strongly supports the retention of the Powerhouse Museum on its present site.  
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23 April 2017: The latest development in the idea of moving the Powerhouse Museum is that the Minister for the Arts has initiated a call for input in terms that enable the idea as a whole to be examined. The 'move' has never been thoroughly assessed, and so far has very little public support. The economics of the whole idea appear to be very suspect, and in the presently advised process a wonderful heritage item will be lost. But whatever your views, please consider taking part:

The Web address for registering is

<http://www.create.nsw.gov.au/arts-in-nsw/new-museum-western-sydney/>

Advocates of saving the Powerhouse Museum strongly proclaim the right of Parramatta people to have improved cultural facilities and to have the facilities they want, not what the government wants to impose without consultation.

Basically:

Demolishing the Powerhouse will not provide any funds for the development of a new museum in Parramatta

The Powerhouse Museum is an item of heritage that must be preserved; it reflects the history of its own area

The Museum of Arts and Sciences is unique in Australia and needs to be retained in the most accessible place for all Australians, and

Parramatta has a great history and a flourishing cultural scene. It deserves support and deserves the right to make its own choice of cultural facilities.....

## SAVE THE POWERHOUSE

Australia's major museum of arts and sciences in Sydney's most evocative heritage building. For more information  
<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/> See also: <https://www.facebook.com/savepowerhousemuseum/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/savethepowerhouse/> <http://lockoweb.com/phm/>

## Demolishing the Powerhouse will not provide any funds for the development of a new museum in Parramatta

- The value of the cleared site is no more than \$250 million dollars<sup>i</sup> if sold as a residential site
- Based on the assessments of a wide group of people, with skills in engineering, transport, real estate, museum administration and curatorial work, it seems clear that the costs of simply removing the exhibits to temporary storage and demolishing the building will at least be that amount<sup>ii</sup>.
- The government has committed to building a modern museum at least equivalent in space to the present museum<sup>iii</sup>. This will cost at the least \$500 million<sup>iv</sup> The current museum is valued at \$450 million and if demolished, this amount will be completely wasted.<sup>v</sup>

It is clear that the destruction of the Powerhouse Museum will not provide anywhere near enough money to build a suitable museum at Parramatta, and will also involve a waste of money through the destruction of a valuable heritage building to clear a building site of lesser value.

## The Powerhouse Museum is an item of heritage that must be preserved; it reflects the history of its own area

In November 1897 work began on the establishment of a major electric tram service from Pyrmont to Millers Point, over 7 km, involving the construction and equipment for Australia's first major electric power station, the acquisition of trams, construction of tram tracks and training of employees in entirely new technology.

Exactly 25 months later, the line opened with about 70 tramcars running and carrying 70 000 people on the first day.<sup>vi</sup> No comparison is made with modern projects!

It would be reasonable for short-cuts to be taken in the building operation for budgetary reasons, but in fact the buildings were constructed magnificently. Care was taken to include decorative brickwork and sandstone entablatures and fittings. The brick walls are massive, up to 1.6 metres thick, of interlocking English brickwork. It was built to last, and its demolition will not be easy.

Similar care was taken with the conversion of Powerhouse to a museum as part of the 1988 bicentennial commemorations. This building won architectural awards and should be preserved as a memento of this exciting time<sup>vii</sup>.

### The Museum of Arts and Sciences is unique in Australia and needs to be retained in the most accessible place for all Australians

Current director of MAAS, Ms Dolla Merrillees, on 11 July this year made the point that this was Australia's major museum of Applied Arts and Sciences<sup>viii</sup>. As such, it occupies an important part in Australia's intellectual heritage and has great potential for future development: the fusion of arts and sciences is becoming more and more important as we move to a post-industrial future. It has state-wide, national and international significance, and the coastal position near the CBD is best suited to its role.

### Parramatta has a great history and cultural scene, and deserves the right to make its own choice of cultural facilities.....

The 'move' suggestion was first made by Infrastructure NSW on 24 October 2014, and they stressed the need for consultation and further examination. It has been taken over as definite policy with by the government<sup>ix</sup> with almost no consultation<sup>x</sup>, not even with Parramatta Council. Research into the move has been dominated by the assumption that the move will proceed<sup>xi</sup>. The best consultation to date has been carried out by the North Parramatta Residents Action Group (NPRAG)<sup>xii</sup>. Basically the combined cultural associations of Parramatta recommend the development of the authentic 'Fleet Street' area into a multipurpose cultural precinct. See

<http://futureparramatta.com.au/fleet-street-heritage-precinct-momca-museum-of-migration-creative-arts/>

Submissions to the current inquiry being held by the NSW Legislative Council, almost universally request comprehensive local consultation to meet local needs. As well as NPRAG, the 'Fleet Street' concept is strongly supported by submissions 21, 117, 142, 142b and 149. Specific topics for consideration include migration (13, 21, 37, 51, 149), early history (NPRAG and subs 21, 42, 119, 143), 149 with special emphasis on Aboriginal history (21, 31, 51, 149), a multipurpose display area (36, 51, 149, 143, 96b, 142b).

There are many options, and great enthusiasm which must be fostered by consultation!

# In these days of post-truth, statements made here are strongly supported by FACTS: Check them out!

## **Abbreviations used:**

UH – the NSW Government Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries established on 23 June 2016, due to issue its report on 30 March 2017. Transcripts, Submissions and other documents are available on

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=202>

PHM: The Ultimo Powerhouse Museum, part of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS)

NPRAG: North Parramatta Residents Action Group

PMA: Powerhouse Museum Alliance, the most significant of many organisations involved in the debate

Heritage PHM: *Heritage of the Powerhouse Museum*, T Lockley, booklet published July 2016

Heritage Buildings: *Heritage Aspects of the Powerhouse Museum Precinct*, T Lockley, booklet published March 2016

SMH: *Sydney Morning Herald*

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<sup>i</sup> Mr Baird first said they expected the Pyrmont site to reap between \$150 and \$200 million and that it would be developed into apartments'. SMH 26 February 2015.

[http://lockoweb.com/heritagephm/darling\\_harbour\\_real\\_estate.htm](http://lockoweb.com/heritagephm/darling_harbour_real_estate.htm) demonstrates value by comparison with nearby sites. This amount must be considerably reduced in view of the statement by Ms Samantha Torres, 4 September, UH transcript p3, 'I believe that the Premier has publicly committed that the Ultimo site will be retained for public use'. \$250 million is thus an extremely optimistic estimate of the sale price.

<sup>ii</sup> The government has a preliminary business plan which will provide an estimate of this cost. It is 'cabinet in confidence' which is not legitimate, as it should be public information paid for by taxpayers. It is reasonable for discussions in the cabinet to be confidential, but not this information. Any realistic assessment of the process must be at least around \$200 million. See also Heritage PHM pp27-8

<sup>iii</sup> UH transcript, 5 September, page 8, other statements have suggested 'a museum 40% bigger', a museum 'one and a third times the size of the existing display area' eg address to volunteers, MAAS, at PHM, 11 October 2016, Mr Parry.

<sup>iv</sup> The minimum quote for a new museum at Parramatta is disclosed in the July 2015 minutes from MAAS Board of Trustees obtained under FOI, is \$450 to \$500 million. More realistic quotes for the type of facility forecast are at least \$500-600 million.

<sup>v</sup> UH Inquiry Submission 148 lists the various sources for this statement, page 3

<sup>vi</sup> A more complete description of the project is seen on page 7 of Heritage PHM.

<sup>vii</sup> Heritage Buildings and Heritage PHM detail these matters. For more specific references email [tomlockley@gmail.com](mailto:tomlockley@gmail.com).

<sup>viii</sup> Address to volunteers, MAAS, at PHM, 11 October 2016, Ms Merrillees

<sup>ix</sup> Letters to the government which question the efficacy of the move are always answered by letters that ignore the matters raised and simply proclaim the virtues of the move without offering evidence in support. See, for example, <http://lockoweb.com/heritagephm/bulletins/may17%20arts.pdf> page 2

<sup>x</sup> Ms Liz-Anne Macgregor, Cultural Ambassador for the west, has discussed the matter mainly with the **Western Sydney Arts and Cultural Lobby**. (UH transcript September 4 page 8). This group consists of individuals and 13 organisations, almost all of which are art and theatre groups. There are no museums or historical groups. Two groups are based on UWS. Their major press release is seen on <http://www.medianet.com.au/releases/release-details/?id=816088>, (Medianet is a professional organisation also used by UWS).

<sup>xi</sup> For example we have information that on the evening of 14 November 2016 a firm called 'Instinct And Reason', 420 Elizabeth Street Surry Hills, conducted a focus group research activity into the move to Parramatta. The participants were told that the museum was moving to Parramatta and then asked what they would like to see at that site. No research investigating attitudes to the 'move' itself can be found, despite enquiries to PHM and Infrastructure Australia. There has been little involvement of Parramatta Council: there has been no survey of Parramatta residents (<http://lockoweb.com/heritagephm/bulletins/chrisssnelling.pdf>) and there are no council representatives on any relevant committee ( see the list of steering committee members on <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryOther/Transcript/10346/Answers%20to%20questions%20on%20notice%20-%20Arts%20NSW%20-%2028%20September%202016.pdf>. See also note (ix) above.

<sup>xii</sup> <http://nprag.org/fleet-streetheritage-symposium-12-october/>