



On 26 November 2014 the then Premier of NSW stood on the banks of the Parramatta River and announced on television that the Powerhouse Museum would be moved from Ultimo to Paramatta as a means of improving the cultural facilities of Western Sydney.

The outcry was immediate and widespread. A who's who of the arts world ran a full page protest advertisement in the major newspapers. A huge 'Save the Powerhouse' Facebook group organised a major petition and eventually a Legislative Council Inquiry was held, lasting three years, with 14 hearing days, and 68 witness appearances. 133 relevant submissions – 94 % of the total received, completely opposed the idea: these included submissions from the National Trust and many other distinguished groups and individuals. No non-Government organisations recommended the 'move' and only a few gave it any support at all.

The reasons for this are clear.

For example, of all the possible means of improving the cultural facilities of Western Sydney this would be the most expensive and wasteful even if only because of the horrendous costs of moving the core exhibits. The existing building was designed to hang aircraft from the ceiling and to support locomotives on the floor. It has a comprehensive steam reticulation network to support its world class collection of steam engines. All this would be wasted at Ultimo and would have to be replicated at huge cost at Parramatta. The Powerhouse complex is an award-winning conversion of magnificently constructed heritage buildings as a museum, a fitting marker for the Bicentennial celebrations of 1988. It was designed as a permanent building, resembling the Louvre and the British Museum in this regard, and no-one at the time believed that a heritage listing could ever be necessary.

The Inquiry and other investigations have clearly demonstrated that there has been no research into alternatives for the laudable aim of improving the cultural facilities of Western Sydney. There was so little prior consultation that the Parramatta Council and the trustees of the museum learnt about it from the media. The report of the Inquiry, with only Government members dissenting, made a

Finding, not just a recommendation, that the process did not meet statutory requirements. Despite the evidence, the Arts Minister's 131-word response relied on unsubstantiated assertions to the contrary, including the completely false statement that highly qualified consultants in cultural infrastructure, museum logistics, urban planning, construction and operations had contributed throughout via peer review processes.

Cost of the project is a minimum of around a billion dollars, an unnecessary waste of scarce resources, particularly now.

The museum is closed to the public during the Coronavirus crisis, but work continues towards the 'move'. An EIS, and also the proposed design of the Parramatta building, are the subjects of mandatory consultation processes, and we are assured that this will be genuine, yet the Infrastructure NSW questionnaire on the subject takes as its basis the assumption that the museum will be relocated. Constituents approaching their local MPs to voice objections are being told that the move is a done deal, but any business agreements regarding the 'move' at this stage would be illegal until 'determination' of the project when the statutory requirements are complete.

One Tom Kennedy has been recently appointed by INSW to the project. A recent achievement was involvement in the demolition of the Sydney Football Stadium, still a wasteland after eighteen months. We have repeatedly asked that no irrevocable action be taken to destroy the Powerhouse until the virus crisis is over, the statutory consultations are finished, and a renewed Legislative Council Inquiry is completed, but no such undertaking has been received. In fact, Mr Kennedy sees the process as an ideal 'snapback' program, to be ready for major works as soon as possible.

We need to be alert, very afraid, and very active to prevent this inevitable disaster.

Tom Lockley, PHG email group, tomlockley@gmail.com , 0403 615 134