

Fact sheet 2 as at 28 July 2020: **The Parramatta Powerhouse.**

Our first fact sheet, dealing with the entire Powerhouse 'move' idea, is largely still relevant despite the Government's wise decision of 4 July that the Powerhouse Museum—part of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS)—will remain open in central Ultimo. This is Australia's only museum dedicated to the important interface between the applied arts and sciences and it would be an act of cultural vandalism to move it from its present magnificent building on its present site, site, most accessible to the state, the country and the world

This sheet is being emailed to the Premier, the Arts Minister, Infrastructure NSW, and the MAAS CEO today to enable checking. As usual, we undertake to correct any false statements and publicise any errors in this document. They have been consistently asserted over the past four years, not just from the enormous Inquiry into Museums and Galleries, and so far no contradictory material has emerged.

The material comes from Parramatta sources and researches of the email group moderated by Tom Lockley which consists of a very wide range of people, many very highly qualified, also many employees and volunteers. Full references supporting each fact are available: check <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/> or email tomlockley@gmail.com. The battle for the Powerhouse Museum has had a win, but the war against wasteful and undemocratic policies continues on this new front.

1. The objective of improving the cultural facilities of Western Sydney is laudable, but the project that has become known as *Powerhouse Parramatta* was not researched before the announced political decision in late 2014. CIPMO, Create NSW and MAAS museum authorities have clearly stated that their actions have resulted from this announced decision.
2. There was no effective consultation with stakeholders before the announcement of the 'move'.
3. This state of affairs has continued: There has never been any later Government-sponsored research or consultation regarding alternatives to moving the Powerhouse Museum to the site chosen by the Government in Parramatta. A sham consultation effort in mid-2017 consisted of asking people what they wanted to see in the new museums and asking for suggestions about the use of the Ultimo site. Zoom consultations over recent months have similarly ignored the fundamental objections to the 'move' that have been expressed, and the consequent *Stakeholder Consultation Report* does not indicate the overwhelming opposition to the proposal. A case in point is that National Trust of NSW which has constantly opposed the process, but in the report this is not mentioned.
4. The site chosen by the Government had been specifically rejected by the elected council prior to its dissolution to enable forced council amalgamation. The land deal was finalised by the unelected administrator only two months before the Government-appointed administrator ceased duty. This person should have been only a caretaker during this period of non-democratic control of council. The move approved only very recently by the re-elected Parramatta Council.(Resolution 2790, narrowly passed on the Mayor's casting vote; a later rescission motion was only narrowly lost). Debate reports indicate that the majority of councilors preferred other options but that the deciding argument was that the council could not pass up this development opportunity regardless of local opposition to this specific project.
5. The idea that only 'up to \$195 million' would be saved by not moving the major objects is risible. The proper museum-standard removal of these objects, their transport and storage, as well as the necessary modifications to the recipient buildings and the necessity for them to be largely last out of Ultimo and first into the Parramatta building would far exceed this cost, as would be proved if accurate calculations were made public.
6. The proposal has been the subject of almost universal criticism. The Government was forced to hold a Legislative Council Inquiry which attracted over 150 relevant submissions. The Government submissions (MGNSW, Government, trustees), expressed support for the project. However of all organizational submissions, including those of the National trust, only two gave qualified support for the move, and all others completely opposed it. Of the over 100 individual submissions, some from very highly qualified people, none supported the project as stated. Non-Government witnesses have been universally condemnatory of the basic idea. The *Save the Powerhouse* Facebook page exemplifies the views of the general public with over 20,000 people involved in active support. Mr Baird, asked at the Inquiry to name one arts group in favour of the move, did not do so even when given three weeks to research the topic.
7. The only significant non-Government organisation to support the move is the Western Sydney Business Chamber (submission no 80 before the current Inquiry). In this submission Mr Borger OAM again justifies the Chamber's position by reference to the 2015 Deloitte document *Building Western Sydney's Cultural Arts Economy* (2015) sponsored by Sydney Business Chamber (Western Sydney). This supported the 'move' and

stressed that the full sale proceeds of the existing Powerhouse site in Eastern Sydney being quarantined to establish the new Museum in Western Sydney — with any surpluses used to fund future Powerhouse Museum programs in Western Sydney. This is a ridiculously low estimate of the costs involved in this project and casts considerable doubt on the competence of both the Premier and of Deloitte in this matter.

8. While the NSW government has produced a myriad of cultural plans and strategies since 2015, none of them specifically provide a policy framework in which we can make sense of the rationale for the move of the Powerhouse to Parramatta. For example, the Government submission to the new Inquiry cites the *Arts 2025 Summit* as supporting its project, but nowhere in the report of the summit does any of the words 'Parramatta', 'Powerhouse' or 'Museum' appear.
9. Museum professionals have been continually excluded from input regarding the project. Examples of this include the panel for the selection of the winning design for the proposed museum: Not one of the jury for the selection of the winning museum design had museum experience. The only time the word 'museum' appears in the notes on the selection committee is in Ms Havilah's job description. She has been CEO since January 2019 and her previous experience and qualifications have been in the general arts field, not museums. No members of Longstaff, the firm responsible for the 2017 business case, had museum qualifications or experience. The current process seems largely to involve personnel from ARUP and we have not been able to find any people with museum qualifications or experience among the people listed
10. The project has been characterised by extreme secrecy. Cabinet confidentiality, 'Commercial in confidence' and / or legal confidentiality have been claimed not only for deliberations in Cabinet, but also to the most peripheral of matters, such as the scope of the various inputs to the decision making process.

The Government has stated that the Ultimo museum will operate alongside a new 'world-class' facility to be built in Parramatta, 23km to the west. In a statement, the government pledged to 'work with MAAS management, the trustees and the broader arts community to determine how the two major sites best complement each other'. We await the beginning of this process, and hope that on this occasion the consultation will be genuine.

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