

My record of Zoom meeting 4 April 2020, re the Powerhouse.

To give credit where it is due, this is the first time (officially since May 1, 2015) that I have been spending at least 2 days per week equivalent full time on the Powerhouse Museum 'move' that I feel that I was able to present the fundamental problems associated with the 'move' to senior people. This does not mean that I have any real hopes that they will be rationally examined, and the fact is that if this project does go ahead, the result will be a complete disaster, and those that have supported it will have to answer for their actions.

Immediate background of this meeting:

- An email to Ms Havilah asking for an assurance that no work would be done on demolishing the Powerhouse during the Coronavirus crisis and pending the heritage assessment consultation process, the Pyrmont-Ultimo development plan consultation and the new Upper House Inquiry.
- Enclosing a copy of my response to the recent so-called heritage assessment of the *Ultimo Tramways Power House* showing that it was nothing more than a licence to destroy all but the shell of the original buildings of this institution.

Response

An invitation to take part in a Zoom meeting – 'an invitation to be part of the stakeholder consultation process for Powerhouse Parramatta'.

When I logged on I was surprised to find that I was the only person being addressed, by Ms H, Tom Kennedy, Development Director of Infrastructure NSW since September 2011 and Kylie Cochrane - Managing Principal, Communication & Stakeholder Engagement - Australia & New Zealand of Aurecon, an engineering, management, design, planning, project management and consulting company based in Australia and South Africa. .

Mr Kennedy is I think a newcomer to the task of trying to present a positive image of the 'move' in the wake of the departure of all the previous Government witnesses to the Inquiry. A very alarming point is that he is an executive responsible for the precipitate demolition of the Sydney Football Stadium just prior to the last State election. The demolition was carried out thoroughly, and the site has remained a wasteland for the past eighteen months.

I fear that Aurecon is a successor to Elton Consulting, and you will remember that they were hired when Mr Harwin promised consultation during the first half of 2017 and Elton's brief was to present a positive view of the museum 'move', not to facilitate consultation. She was a very pleasant person who did not cut me off when I asked difficult questions, as Mr Elton did, notably to Trevor Kennedy at the Ultimo meeting of 30 July 2017. She has subsequently assured me that this time the consultation will be genuine. Not so, I fear, but at least we are allowed to talk.

I was told that notes were being taken by a fourth person.

At the outset I was asked not to electronically record the meeting and I agreed to this. I did take notes, but the following interpretation of these is not sequential. I was noting new points raised and also jotting down questions that I wanted to ask.

I want again to make the point that the MAAS participants were courteous and ensured as far as possible that I could make my questions and explain our position.

Part 1: Presentation by Ms Havilah, Mr Kennedy, Ms Cochrane

The usual stuff about how good the museum would be at Parramatta. (The slides were new but there was not a lot of new information. Emphases included rethinking the museum concept, and long operating hours, 'not just 10 to 5'. A picture of the Garden Palace was I think intended to forecast a new stage of development in the new museum. The live-in organisation of 40 apartments for collaborators of the museum and a sixty bed dormitory for school groups was highlighted. The presentation of material would be modern and the aim was to build a unit that was integrated with the local area. The proximity to the Parramatta CBD was seen as a great advantage. A timeline for development was given by Tom Kennedy, the procurement process to begin early next year. (There was no mention of any alteration to the plan to close much of PHM Ultimo in July, and no undertaking that there would be no irrevocable action towards 'moving' the museum to Parramatta as requested above).

This summary does not do their presentation justice. It took about 18 minutes, but I did interrupt a few times with questions and comments.

Part 2: Questions and discussion.

I began with a statement that the forces opposing the destruction of PHM supported the idea of building a quality museum and/or similar facilities in Parramatta. My opinion was that we were close to agreement: all they had to do was to leave the Powerhouse as is where is, and build new facilities in Parramatta, relevant to Parramatta's needs and history, on a site approved by the Council, with the money that would be wasted by moving the Powerhouse..

During the half hour I believe I made the following points:

There are fundamental flaws in the process:

1. There has never been examination of the null case and alternatives to meeting the need to improve cultural facilities in Parramatta as required in Treasury documents TPP 08-5, TPP 18-06 and TPP 17-01. Ms Havilah said that the Business Case had covered this but the April 2017 Summary Business Case clearly states that INSW had simply taken *as its starting point the Government's decision to locate the Powerhouse Museum on the Riverbank site in Parramatta* (Final Business Case Summary, April 2017, page 2). No evidence has been adduced that this statement is not accurate and my interlocutors were unable to shed light on this matter.
2. Similarly there had been no consultation with stakeholders – even the Trustees and the Parramatta Council had read about the idea in the papers (detailed evidence from the Inquiry can be cited). Likewise, no contradictory evidence regarding this statement has emerged.
3. Specifically, I stated that the elected Parramatta Council before its dissolution (12 May 2016) was steadfastly opposed to the use of the current site for the relocated museum. It had been acquired by the unelected administrator less than three months before the expiration of her supposedly caretaker role. The Council has never passed a resolution supporting this purchase, and the only resolution passed by the new democratically elected council regarding the site was a unanimous request for the retention of the heritage buildings on the site (Council resolution 1395 of 25 June 2017). Ms Havilah referred me to *Culture and Our City, A Cultural Plan for Parramatta's CBD 2017-2022* for evidence that the Parramatta Council approved the use of the land for this purpose and comments on this are in a separate paper.

4. The presented documents do not take into account the calculable value of heritage in museums. There is a whole academic strand of research into such matters. a typical publication is *Valuing the Priceless: The Value of Historic Heritage in Australia*, Research Report 2 November 2005 Prepared for the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand <https://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/info/pubs/valuing-priceless.pdf>. There is great significance of having one of the best collections of working steam engines in the world in its country's first electricity generation turbine hall which can never be realised in a new modern building such as that indicated by the current preferred design. No comment was made on this.

I reiterated another basic objection to the museum 'move': the principal inheritance from the Garden Palace is the tradition of fostering the relationship between the applied arts and sciences, as per its progenitors the V&A and the London Science Museum. PHM has been recognised as the only museum in Australia dedicated to this interface, and logically should be in the most accessible place for the city, the state, the country and the world. Again, no comment was made.

There has been a general concern about the lack of museum expertise in the process.

The massive Inquiry into Museums and Galleries provided copious evidence supporting the finding that the *Final Business Case for the Powerhouse Museum in Western Sydney Project* did not comply with NSW Treasury Guidelines for Cost-Benefit analysis. In his scanty response, Mr Harwin, *inter alia*, stated that *highly qualified consultants in cultural infrastructure, museum logistics, urban planning contributed via peer review processes and governance panels*. He made a similar claim to the Inquiry on 29 August 2017 when spurning the offer of assistance from highly experienced, capable and qualified experts, but the reality was that the much-vaunted *Expert Advisory Group* aka *Expert Advisory Panel* of 2017 was vastly different and there is no evidence of appropriate such contributions since that time.

Also we investigated the background of all NSW-based employees of Johnstaff, a firm responsible for the production of the Business Case papers released after 2017. None had museum qualifications and few had even any background or experience in other arts fields. Mr Price, before his abrupt departure, said that there was a person with appropriate qualifications but he or his staff were unable to supply details.

This leads to questions about the move process itself.

Museum experts are worried about many aspects of the establishment of the new museum. Some sample issues are listed, and there are very many:

1. Boulton and Watt steam engine. We understand that at least until very recently that no risk assessment had been made regarding the relocation and need to be reassured that a competent assessment has at last been made. Our engineers doubt that the wooden framework will no longer be fit for purpose if dismantled and reassembled and we would like assurance on this point also. There are grave concerns that because of crystallization of the cast iron it is very fragile.
2. Catalina. The idea of having all valuable exhibits above flood level is sound, but we would like to be reassured that the implications of this is fully understood. The idea of moving the Very Large Objects, as noted by the expert group Root Associates, is fraught with difficulty: they will, by and large, have to be last out of Ultimo and first into Parramatta. Effectively, the only place in which the aircraft can be inserted is at the corner of Phillip Street and Wilde

Avenue: the largest piece, the fuselage and the integrated wing pylon, is too big to be maneuvered into place at any other point. The reassembly of the aircraft is difficult enough at ground level, but adding the necessity of raising the pieces up to appropriate display halls above the flood free level increases the complexity enormously. Again, we need to know that these matters have been considered and properly costed.

3. The moving of the pioneer Aerial Ambulance is at least as difficult. The monocoque construction is such that only wingtips can be removed, and it would have to be lowered into a specially made cradle: it cannot possibly be just rested on the ground. The consequent size of the cradle and aircraft again impose great difficulties. The machine was subject to severe stress while being installed and there are fears that this will have weakened the structure.
4. The Saturn 5 rocket engine is huge, and must be transported in a framework of the type in which it is currently installed. It cannot rest unsupported. We believe that the galleries proposed are entirely inadequate.

(I have checked these points with museum experts and they agree that they are valid. However an even more serious matter has emerged which will be dealt with shortly after more research is done - tl, 7/4/2020)