

'Zoom' meeting for Parramatta people 7/4/2020

Notes by Tom Lockley. (Ms Havilah said that a full summary would be sent to all participants. In previous such 'consultations' these summaries have been long delayed because they have to be checked by a wide range of people and the final results always downplay the opposition to the 'move'. We will see if this 'consultation' is any different.)

I observed the Zoom 'consultation' meeting for Parramatta people conducted 7 April 2020 at 1 pm. In accordance with an agreement with Ms Kylie Cochrane, I did not take part: I had already had an individual session as described elsewhere. I did have a few technical problems and distractions during the two-hour meeting but the following are my impressions, and are basically accurate.

I recorded 24 participants. Four were observers only.

The chief takeaway was that no respondent was fully happy with the 'move'. The most favourable opinions were four grudging acceptances of the inevitability of the 'move'.

At least 15 respondents stressed consultation deficiencies. No notice had been taken of four years of input from many. Consultation outreach typically stated that the museum would be transplanted, and comments sought were about aspects of this *fait accompli*. People were generally cynical about the chances of any of the objections being rationally considered. There had been no consultation about the type of cultural facilities that the Parramatta people wanted – they were simply told that the Powerhouse Museum would be transplanted to the Government's chosen site. Most thought that this round of so-called consultation would be of similar shonky standard. Ms H and Ms C said that this was not so, that this round of consultation was the early stage of a new process.

Key takeaway: Ms H said that consultation was important and would be effective until the project had been 'determined', and which had not been done yet. The site was the Governments 'preferred' site, for example, and the project was still only 'proposed. She was committed to getting the best outcome for the community.

A Community Reference Group was being formed to assist. (But in the concluding remarks from Ms H said that consultation was about listening to the community, not necessarily doing what the community wanted: many people had differing views and not everyone would be satisfied with the outcome. I refrain from making editorial comment!)

The next most common response (11) was a concern for the demolition of heritage buildings at the museum site, and also destruction and neglect of heritage in Parramatta generally (eg swimming pool demolished in 2017, earliest possible finishing date for replacement 2023) and regarding the demolition of the Ultimo museum.

Other responses included:

- Questioning the relevance and effectiveness of the 60 apartments to the core business of a museum (Ms H explained that they would be used for researchers etc)
- Building was unfriendly, not organic, would not appeal to autistic people for example
- Fleet street precinct plan favoured by the people was not preferred to the planned building
- This was not so much a museum as an entertainment centre. The traditional values of the museum and its exhibits were not being respected.

- There had been no local participation in the design process. (Mr K explained the composition of the design judging team which included the Parramatta Council architect).
- Question about what came first – the desire to move PHM or the need to do something cultural for Parramatta?

This was a two hour meeting