



PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB

P.O. Box 85, HUNTERS HILL, N.S.W. 2110

9-3-2020 Powerhouse Museum 3_2020

The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, MP

NSW Premier
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Premier,

Re: Government responsibility for State Heritage, history and culture

I write as President of the Hunters Hill Trust regarding the Government's plans to dismantle and relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. This is the second time the Trust has written to you on this matter to reiterate our concerns about the enormous cost and negative impacts of the proposal. We would appreciate a response from you as Premier of our State entrusted with leading the decisions of your government.

We ask for your personal consideration of this matter because we believe that the custodianship of our State's heritage, history and culture should be approached with integrity and bipartisan support, which clearly the current Powerhouse relocation proposal does not have. We note that a fresh parliamentary inquiry has been launched into your government's \$1.5 billion plan to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta, as well as disparities in funding support for city and regional galleries and museums.

The Powerhouse Museum is a world class institution with highly significant collections that have been collectively built up by and invested in by the people of NSW. Many generations of taxpayers have contributed to and donated important collections of material to the Museum as part of the legacy, story and history of Sydney and our State. The site and its collections are owned by the people of NSW and held in Trust as a gift from previous generations to future generations and, as a whole, they inform our sense of identity and our future.

Overwhelmingly the voices of the community have advocated to:

- preserve the Powerhouse Museum and its substantial investment in its Ultimo precinct for continuing enjoyment by all at its current transport accessible location and;
- build a new locally influenced cultural institution at Parramatta that speaks to the history, sense of place and local community of Parramatta and;
- use funding saved from moving the Powerhouse museum to create regional museums and galleries.

The community has also spoken clearly on its desire to protect the State Significant Heritage of the Powerhouse Museum's built heritage in Ultimo and Willow Grove House and St George's Terrace in Parramatta.

Given the Powerhouse Museum project in Parramatta has now been declared a 'State Significant Project' with plans announced for what is considered a poorly chosen, flood-prone site, we write with a sense of great dismay at your Government's seeming lack of appreciation for the State's history, heritage and cultural institutions. The use of this 'State Significant' legislation appears to only be to enable the Government to override and ignore all reasonable opposition or community input and permit the destruction of local heritage. There has been a chorus of voices raising serious concern about the inappropriateness of the old David Jones car-park site in Parramatta - reinforced by the recent flooding of the site. No museum in the world would plan to build on a flood prone site and experts and Museum professionals have made this case through numerous channels that have been ignored. The published proposals for the site will not only destroy cherished local heritage but will require significant engineering controls and expense to protect the site from the well documented flooding that occurs.

The Powerhouse Museum was a visionary project delivered for the Australian Bicentenary - building on a long association with Ultimo and with the industrial history of the precinct that was appropriate for a collection of 'applied arts and sciences' . This history and sense of place and identity should not be dismantled. The Powerhouse Museum and its wonderful collections relating to science, applied arts, design and technology should be reinvigorated and connected to the arts, design and teaching institutions on its doorstep. Ultimo does not need a downgraded 'arts and cultural space' when millions have been committed to 'Sydney Modern' at the Art Gallery of NSW (which could have been built at Parramatta) and there is also the MCA at Circular Quay.

It is well known that over a decade of considered, consultative and specialist planning went into building the Powerhouse Museum following years of detailed work by a team of professional museum experts. The shortened timeframes currently proposed for the Parramatta project risk the security and protection of the collections themselves, particularly as the specialist knowledge within the institution has been significantly depleted. This fast tracking will ensure poor outcomes, compromised design and cost blowouts.

There are also negative costs beyond building a new museum offering in Parramatta in:

- the value lost in demolishing existing purpose built, specialist climate controlled, fire protected and specialist collections storage infrastructure
- the value lost in demolishing the purpose built specialist conservation laboratories and workshops
- the cost to move the vast collections that are on display and in storage in Ultimo - many of which are priceless and unique in the world and some specifically that were transported into the museum along the old rail lines and before walls were built
- the value lost in the investment in engineering solutions to hang, house and display priceless objects such as the Boulton and Watt rotative steam engine - one of the oldest in the world still capable of working
- the inevitable cost escalations in rushed and ill-conceived museum planning
- the loss to the broader community, in its historic links to the Ultimo precinct and easy access to Sydneysiders, international tourists and regional NSW visitors in its current location.

Parramatta deserves its own cultural facilities that reflect the history and character of its region. There is great cost in demolishing one cultural offering to create another. A cultural facility at Parramatta can be developed without the encumbrance of the costs and energy of

dismantling and moving the collections to an inappropriate location and design for a museum collection. Rather local stories and heritage can be showcased more relevant to the region from not only the Powerhouse collections, but also the vast collections from the Australian Museum, the State Library and the Art Gallery of NSW.

We implore you to leave the Powerhouse Museum intact in Ultimo, enhance its connections to nearby learning institutions and create a cultural institution for Parramatta that draws on their stories, communities and sense of place - as a branch of the Powerhouse Museum if that is determined to be appropriate. Without question, Parramatta's rich colonial, aboriginal and migration history and the vibrant community arts deriving from this should be located in the North Parramatta Heritage precinct. This alternate location would create a far greater visionary legacy than dislocation of the Powerhouse Museum to an ill-suited, compromised, flood prone and smaller site that would not pass a serious risk analysis. The savings that will be achieved by not moving the Powerhouse Museum collections can then also be invested in the regions that deserve more cultural infrastructure.

Premier, we hope that you will reconsider your decision to move the Powerhouse Museum. The history in Parramatta is unique and distinct and the proposed loss of one location in favour of the other is a diminishing of both and unjust on the regional communities of NSW.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alister Sharp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alister Sharp PhD
President Hunters Hill Trust
9 March 2020

Cc John Barilaro, Leader of the Nationals, Deputy Premier, and Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade
Jodi McKay, Leader of the Opposition
Mr David Shoebridge, MLC, Greens
Mr Robert Borsak, MLC, Shooters, Fishers and Farmers
Anthony Roberts, Member for Lane Cove
Editor, Sydney Morning Herald