

POWERHOUSE BULLETIN

May 2018: The Powerhouse 'Move' – what next?

The evidence shows that

1. This was a thought bubble promulgated by the former Premier: There is evidence of **no research into alternatives**
2. There is evidence of **no appropriate consultation** with any stakeholders before announcement of the project as a done deal
3. The **originally announced budget was ridiculous**
4. Later scraps of information that have been released indicate **a huge waste of money** caused by lack of consideration of better alternatives for both locations
5. The **site choice is undemocratic** and ignores the expressed will of the elected council prior to the period of the administrator, not to mention the possible risks of flooding
6. The **Parramatta people do not want the Powerhouse Museum**: they want to choose the most suitable developments for their own cultural and heritage needs
7. **The Powerhouse Museum is a unique item of Australian Heritage** and should not be degraded
8. The **government has not given out any significant information** about their research and planning, thus supporting the opinion that the 'move' is indefensible
9. The **government has ignored massive opposition**, founded on knowledge, fact and research

What has to happen

1. Australia's only museum of applied arts and sciences stays where it is: in the most accessible site for the city the state, the country and the world. It retains its iconic traditional exhibits, in its unique heritage building, with appropriate facilities and funding.
2. The basic fabric of all Powerhouse Museum buildings, including the Harwood building, is preserved.
3. Parramatta gets a magnificent new museum and/or other cultural facilities on a site that is democratically approved and of a type that is properly researched and democratically selected.

We call on the government and the opposition to unite, to review the evidence, and to reassess this idea. Our state's policies must be guided by democratic process, and motivated by such things as economic wisdom and appreciation of cultural and heritage values. A spirit of consultation and co-operation among all will achieve great outcomes.

**In this era of fake news, our assertions are backed by
FACTS: Check them for yourself**

1. There has been no research into alternatives:

The Business Cases are supposed to have been prepared according to Treasury Paper tpp 08-5, *Guidelines for the Construction of Business Cases*. This requires the government first to assess alternatives for achieving their aims: there is no evidence that this was ever done. the government has tried to say that Infrastructure NSW researched this, but Infrastructure NSW only suggested investigation of the 'move' (paper of November 3 2015) and Premier announced the move on 26 November.

Further, in the so-called Business Case Summary, Infrastructure NSW states *The Business Case takes as its starting point the Government's decision to locate the Powerhouse Museum*, making it clear that they did no research into alternatives.

When asked about these matters the government employees say they conducted no such research, the decision was made by the government eg Powerhouse Museum Director Merrillees, Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries evidence 17 February 2017 p17; Arts NSW CEO Samantha Torres, Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries evidence 5 September 2016 p18

2. There has been no appropriate consultation

Even the MAAS trustees were not consulted, just told that the move was happening, eg see the Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries evidence 14 Nov 16 p34. (Prof. Shine).

Some consultation focus groups were held in late 2016 but they and July 2017 meetings were asked simply what they wanted at new Parramatta Museum.

There is very little other evidence of consultation, eg Ms Macgregor said that discussed the move only with Western Sydney Arts and Cultural Lobby who 'supported' the idea but did not initiate it or discuss alternatives at that time. This group consists of individuals and 13 organisations, mainly art and theatre groups; there are no museums or historical groups. (the Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries evidence 5 September 2016 p34, submission 36 p4).

No consultation was undertaken by the unelected Parramatta administrator until well past December 2016 (email from Parramatta Council). Arts Minister the Hon D Harwin ('Other Documents' from Museums Inquiry website 27 June 2017) promised information bulletins

re Powerhouse Museum in Create NSW email bulletins but none were received. The specially created new.maas.museum website had only seven posts and one link in 8 months, none addressing the 80+ basic questions asked at the 'consultation' meetings. See the North Parramatta Regional Action Group symposium described in section 6 for comparison.

3: The initially announced budget was ridiculous

The original government idea guaranteed that all proceeds would be used for the museum and any surplus for arts support in Parramatta. This was repeated by Deloitte document *Building Western Sydney's Cultural Arts Economy* (2015) sponsored by Sydney Business Chamber (Western Sydney) Both the government and Deloitte thus reveal incompetence, because the maximum value of the cleared site was estimated (January 16) at \$250 million (Andrew Zhang, Manager, Hookers Real Estate, Pyrmont, using comparison with other available sites; the government value is similar).

Powerhouse Museum Alliance experts calculate the cost of removing and storing the material from Powerhouse Museum at at least \$200 million and demolition costs about \$10 million. Land alone at Parramatta cost \$140 million so the project was in debt already. The building estimate for the new building is now estimated at about \$1 billion (The so-called Business Case Summary p7).

The amount realised from sale of site for development has since been reduced by commitments to maintain an arts presence at the Ultimo site so the initial finance arrangements are even more ridiculous.

4. A huge waste of money was revealed even by later announcements

Display of heavy items eg train, suspended planes, requires especially strong buildings not required by other ideas eg those listed in section 6. The large items will often have to be last out of Powerhouse Museum and first into Parramatta museum with consequent years of building delays. A perfectly functioning steam reticulation will need to be rebuilt. *The pointless, costly and risky move of 240,000 objects from Ultimo to Castle Hill is a scandalous waste of money for no public benefit or cultural outcome.* (K Winkworth, World-recognised Museum authority)

5. The government's site choice is undemocratic

The democratically elected Parramatta City Council (to 12 May 2016) was steadfastly opposed the use of the recently 'acquired' site for the relocated museum (see Resolution 16308, 14 December 2015; Resolution 16353, 14 January 2016; and Resolution 16646, 9 May 2016). The fact that the 9 May 2016 meeting was the last meeting of the elected council demonstrates the importance placed by the elected council on the views expressed. Land was 'acquired' under the non-elected, supposedly 'caretaker' Administrator on 31 July 2017.

No record of approval of, or even discussion of, the acquisition can be found in council minutes etc on the democratically elected 'new' Parramatta council website since the restoration of democracy.

After over a year as administrator, in June 2017 appointed an Expert Steering Committee, none of whom had significant museum experience and they approved the purchase plan with no recognition that it contradicted the views of the elected government.

6. The Parramatta people do not want the Powerhouse Museum.

The HillPDA study February 2017 (page 4) and Deloitte Review of Heads of Agreement July 2017 cited by the non-elected Council Administrator as evidence of consultation at the Legislative Council Inquiry hearing on 29 August do not canvass any alternatives to that already 'announced' by the government. It has been argued by PMA members that the 'Evidence' submitted by the government and Council of the wholehearted support of Parramatta people for the Powerhouse move is not based on valid empirical studies: this is a complex subject, details are available on request, but cannot be developed here for reasons of space.

The best consultation to date is North Parramatta Residents' Action Group October 2016: the combined cultural associations of Parramatta recommend the development of the authentic 'Fleet Street' area into a multipurpose cultural precinct, and local choice of arts facilities: supported eg by the Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries Submissions 21, 117, 142, 142b and 149. Specific projects suggested include migration (13, 21, 37, 51, 149), early history (North Parramatta Residents' Action Group and subs 21, 42, 119, 143), 149 with special emphasis on Aboriginal history (21, 31, 51, 149), a Questacon or multipurpose display area (36, 51, 149, 143, 96b, 142b).

7. The Powerhouse Museum is a unique item of Australian Heritage

The first building housed Australia's first industrial-scale powerhouse, built in 25 months, (finished December 1899), while simultaneously 10 km of tram tracks were laid and 100 trams put on the line, training everyone in new technology. Standards of original building, subsequent additions and award-winning conversion only 30 years ago are magnificent. No comparison is made with the current situation in regard to light rail construction!

No heritage classification was sought for the Powerhouse Museum as no-one could have believed that this magnificent building was under threat. Graham Quint, National Trust advocate, applied for Powerhouse Museum heritage listing in November 2015, and this application has not yet been considered under this government in the 2+ years since submission. Heritage values are not assessed, and, we believe, not even mentioned, by the government in their evidence or submissions.

8. The government has not given out any significant information

The so-called Business Case Summary released April 27 this year had to be extracted from the government by a parliamentary vote that passed because of a defection by a government MLC. It goes nowhere near providing the sort of evidence required in Treasury Paper tpp 08-5, *Guidelines for the Construction of Business Cases*. (this is a complex matter that cannot be discussed here due to lack of space). The Business Cases were developed with taxpayers' money and there seems no reason why they cannot be released.

Letters to the government and to government and opposition members typically ignore any questions asked and simply reply with a standard letter saying how good the 'move' idea is. At the Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries Government witnesses have refused to give basic information claiming it is 'Cabinet in confidence' (37 times in the Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries evidence alone). 'Cabinet in confidence' traditionally applies to discussions made within the cabinet, leading to the

convention that Cabinet speaks with one voice, having deliberated the matter in question and determined a policy. the government has extended it to denying information about the business case itself, and the consultant's terms of reference and reports that contribute to the business case, and even to material such as the vital logistic information provided by Peter Root Associates to assist consultants.

9 The government has ignored massive opposition

The announcement of the move created instant opposition from those who appreciate Australian heritage, but when the implications were examined, it became clear that the economics of the 'move' were disastrous. No profit could be made from the sale of the Powerhouse precinct even with the most drastic demolition. The protests escalated: protesters included

- 11,000 signatories to the petition presented to NSW Parliament, 25 Feb 2016
- - 178 signatories to the Powerhouse Museum Alliance 's 17 Feb 2016 open letter
- - authors of the 133 submissions to the Upper House Inquiry who oppose the Powerhouse move – representing 94% of all the submissions about the Powerhouse; these include the National Trust of NSW, Museums Australia, the International Council on Monuments and Sites and many other professional, artistic and historical groups
- - countless museum visitors and supporters from across NSW, around Australia and overseas

and members of many organisations including

- The Save the Powerhouse Facebook group
<https://www.facebook.com/savethepowerhouse/>
- The Powerhouse Museum Alliance <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/>
- North Parramatta Residents Action Group <http://nprag.org/>
- Pyrmont History Group

These pages were edited by Tom Lockley, of Pyrmont History Group, drawing on many sources. All questions and comments are welcome, and any errors found will be corrected as soon as possible through the above websites. Best method of contact is tomlockley@gmail.com , phone number is 0403 615 134