



Conflict of interest seemed to be a recent development

The aphorism “never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity” has not become a philosophical guideline for no reason.

Take, for example, Arts Minister **Don Harwin’s** handling of the Powerhouse Museum’s move to Parramatta. It takes a particular talent to spend \$645 million on a state-of-the-art institution and still anger residents near the present Ultimo precinct and at the museum’s new site.

Then there’s the question of what to do with the lucrative plot of land left over once the Powerhouse — officially the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences — moves.

As CBD revealed in December, Dexis chief executive **Darren Steinberg** unexpectedly quit the museum’s board in August due to a “possible conflict” over the land’s sale.

Cynics, of course, suggest the decision to move the Powerhouse to Parramatta had as much to do with unlocking its inner-city digs for apartment and commercial development as it did with bringing a valuable cultural institution to Sydney’s west.

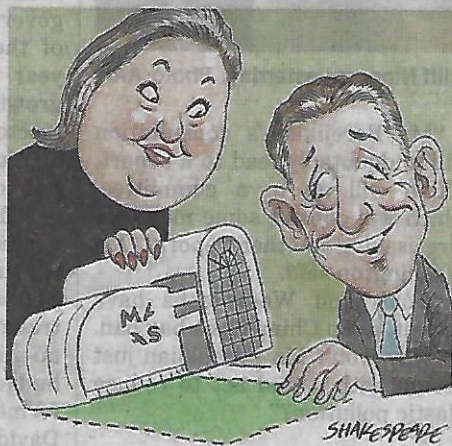
Any potential conflict-of-interest was “actively managed by the trustees ... according to a conflict of interest declaration and associated undertaking provided by Mr Steinberg,” a spokeswoman for the MAAS Trust, which manages the museum, told us last week.

Minutes of the trust’s board meetings, obtained by this column last week, make particularly interesting reading in light of those assurances. “[MAAS chief executive] **Lisa Havilah** updated Trust on the Creative Industries Precinct Business Case, the masterplan being developed and the proposed market sounding for the site,” the minutes of the July 10 meeting, attended by Steinberg, read.

More interesting still are the

accompanying action items. “**Lisa Havilah** to brief Trustee **Darren Steinberg** on the market sounding documents for the Ultimo site prior to their release,” the first reads. “Trust requested a full briefing of the draft master plan and market sounding from **Annette Pitman**, Create NSW.”

Steinberg, so the MAAS maintains, had no special interest in the site of the old museum until after the board meeting. Did Havilah’s precis of development plans spark it? Through a spokeswoman, Havilah denied personally briefing Steinberg as noted in the board minutes.



The reason? He’d resigned, citing a “possible conflict” with his day job at Dexis.

PACKER’S TO RAFTERS

The Bleak City set might have gathered on Thursday to hear from MacBank boss **Shemara Wikramanayake** for the annual Melbourne Foundation for Business and Economics dinner at the National Gallery of Victoria but the real party was, well, in Sydney.

Wikramanayake’s speech — described by one attendee as a TED Talk at \$10,000 a table — did draw a serious crowd, including former A2 chief **Jayne Hrdlicka**, News Corp operator **Siobhan McKenna**, former BHP chairman **Don Argus**, former ANZ chair **Charles Good** and Medibank boss **Craig Drummond**.

But it was the knees-up in **Gretel Packer’s** Bellevue Hill home that was the real hot ticket. The Sydney Theatre Company Foundation chairwoman welcomed the Walsh Bay-domiciled institution’s well-heeled supporters on Thursday night. Our correspondents spotted billionaire art philanthropists **Luca and Anita Belgiorno-Nettis**, ex-PM **Malcolm Turnbull** and his Greater Sydney Commission chairwoman wife **Lucy**, former Commonwealth Bank chief **Ian Narev**, designer **Carla Zampatti** and Cate Blanchett’s husband **Andrew Upton**.

Also noted: former Sotheby’s Australia chairman **Justin Miller** and poultry royalty **John and Frances Ingham**. Packer’s party was held just in time to celebrate the STC’s latest production — the **Sarah Giles**-directed *No Pay? No Way!* And for \$5000 a chair, we may as well add No S—.

PARTY POSTURE

On Friday, we spotted a curious stream of party operatives at the Labor HQ over on Sussex Street. Was that Labor treasury spokesman **Jim Chalmers** heading into Trades Hall in the morning? And Labor deputy **Richard Marles**, Senator **Deborah O’Neill** and Health Services Union secretary **Gerard Hayes** that afternoon?

Sources familiar with the meetings told this column it was a catch-up to brief union heads, including Australian Workers Union boss **Daniel Walton** and others, on the party’s Right-faction positions ahead of a national conference in December. No doubt there was much to discuss. It’s no secret the party has some way to go to arrive at a consensus position on issues including coal mining and an emissions reductions target.

Not spotted: Labor’s deputy Senate leader **Kristina Keneally**, who was in Melbourne on official business. Roiling behind the scenes, of course, is the O’Neill/Keneally cold war over the party’s top Senate spot at the next election. O’Neill appears to have stronger union support but would Labor really dump its outspoken home affairs spokeswoman into a precarious third position — after the Left’s **Jenny McAllister** — on the ticket?