

Submission to Pymont Peninsula sub-precinct master plans consultation, 1 February 2022.

From Tom Lockley, private citizen, Pymont.

General Comment

In comparison to many other world cities, Sydney has considerable advantages which give it the possibility of being outstanding in terms of livability and attractiveness. Pymont, in many respects, is a good example. Consequently,

1. The remaining foreshore land and access to the water must be maintained and wherever possible, improved.
2. Heritage buildings, particularly low rise, must be preserved.
3. The importance of reservation of heritage buildings applies particularly to the Powerhouse Museum.
4. The Darling Harbour area, developed as part of the 1988 bicentennial celebrations, has enough high rise at present. Further, the harbourside shopping centre should be retained as is as an example of the architectural style that was current when it was developed.
5. Community-developed plans for improvement of Union Square should be carried out not only because of their intrinsic merit but to demonstrate that the decision makers do indeed take notice of worthy grassroots initiative.

1. The Blackwater Bay water frontage

As recently as within the last 25 years several buildings have been erected, along Bank Street, Jones Street and Bulwarra Road for example, that have an open vista in front of them with good water views. It is now proposed to build a series of high rise buildings in front of them on land that should be for public use, or at worst, for some low rise buildings.

As a result of the proposed high rise buildings the general vistas of the bay and of the Anzac Bridge will be restricted, and the area will become typical of the overdeveloped highrise precincts seen in many other world cities.

The presently available public access to the waterside is restricted, and all remaining areas such as the Blackwater Bay water frontage must be protected in their entirety.

There has been a huge development in high rise building for apartments over recent years. It seems inevitable that Covid is causing great changes to how people live and work, and it is likely that the new building development will contribute to a situation of oversupply. For example growth from immigration is not as certain as it was a few years ago. We need to have a pause on major developments of this type until we see what happens. It is notable that two recent luxury developments, *Paragon* and *Grande Pymont*, do not appear to have a high occupancy rate even though they have been finished for a few years. There are plenty of other areas within the peninsula that can be developed for high rise while still maintaining this waterfront area for more appropriate use.

2. Heritage low rise

All areas listed in *Heritage Planning Context*, section 2 of ***Pymont Peninsula Place Strategy— Final Report*** must be protected. This should be supported by ensuring that neighbouring developments are considered so that the surrounds of these buildings are not canyon-like highrise.

3. Powerhouse Museum

The fact that the Powerhouse Museum site is shown as being capable of change is very alarming. The project of moving the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta, inaugurated in November 2014, has been comprehensively shown to be ill-founded and badly executed. The Government has accepted the fact sheet attached without correction.

4. Darling Harbour

This area was developed as a bicentennial project, less than 40 years ago, and already large areas of this development have been destroyed. We saw images of the Darling Square precinct development that gave indications of wide open sunlit spaces but the reality is narrow, permanently shaded lanes among medium-rise buildings.

The last remaining low rise building is the Harbourside Shopping Centre, designed by world famous Australian architect John Andrews. It should be preserved for its intrinsic worth and as an example of architectural forms of the period. Another compelling reason for its retention is that it will impinge on other buildings behind it that were built less than 40 years ago in the expectation that this modern development would have a much longer life

5. Union Square

The Friends of the Pymont Community Centre have made a submission supporting the redevelopment of Union Square. This is a relatively low-cost project submitted by a group of talented and diverse community people who have worked tirelessly over decades. As their submission says, 'the social and commercial benefits would greatly outweigh the cost of the work'. It should be carried out even if only to demonstrate that the development process does indeed take notice of at least some consultative input.

Attachment: Fact sheet re the Powerhouse Museum project. It demonstrates the appalling standard of the planning process and underlines the need for preservation of the precinct and the museum.

Powerhouse Museum 'move' project fact sheet as at 26 January 2022

This material typically comes from an informal email group that has been functioning since 1 May 2016. Over 100 active members include present and past MAAS employees and volunteers, other Government employees and contractors, a wide range of other people with skills in engineering, architecture and the arts, and general museum members and supporters with many relevant skills and experiences. Volunteers and employees have in the past been ordered to present a favourable view of the 'move' of the museum, and employees feel that if they express dissident views they will be discriminated against for future employment. Museum jobs are scarce and highly sought after, so this fear is understandable. Other correspondents who have Government jobs or ties to Government projects have similar concerns. In a rational democracy, such fears should be groundless, but the irrational and arbitrary decision-making that is demonstrated in these submissions cause people to lose confidence in democratic processes.

Basic facts, developed 2015-2020

The following FACTS have been proven over the past four years and our first fact sheet was submitted to the Government in August 2017.. No contradictory material has emerged even though they have been brought to the attention of all concerned. On Monday 21 January 2019, for example, the Premier, the Arts Minister and other politicians received, by registered mail and by email, a fact sheet facts, with a covering letter formally requesting comment or refutation, but consistently there has been no response. These matters were also presented in a 1:1 interview with Ms Havilah at PHM at 12 noon on Wednesday 6 November 2019 and she was invited to present any evidence of error in any point. She has not been able to do so, and neither has any Government politician or agency. (It is agreed with Ms Havilah that any communication with her is equivalent to direct communication with the Arts Ministry). This sheet is the latest version and is being presented through the normal channels to INSW, Create Australia and MAAS Museum, requesting that all errors be reported to us, and we undertake to publicise widely any response

Full references supporting each fact are available: check <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/> or email

1. The idea of moving the Powerhouse Museum was not researched. It was an announced political decision in late 2014. CIPMO, Infrastructure NSW and MAAS museum authorities have clearly stated that their actions have resulted from this announced decision, and there was no pre-announcement research into alternative strategies for the laudable objective of improving the cultural facilities of Western Sydney.

'The Powerhouse Museum will move from Ultimo to Parramatta (Parramatta Advertiser, November 26, 2014 10:35 am)

2. People with significant experience and / or academic qualifications in museum work have been almost systematically excluded from decision-making processes. Trustees 2014-20 have had no such people; no such people were found in an audit of Johnstaff employees who prepared the 2018 Business Case; even the architects and other experts called to the first Inquiry were careful to state that they were responding to detailed briefs provided by the Government and were not asked for an assessment of the project; there were no such people involved in the architectural work of the 2019-20 design competition; in the released SO52 documents no such people figured among addresses involved in the planning. We have been able to document only a few hours of consultation with any such people during the entire process.

3. There has been no consultation with stakeholders about the basic 'move' idea. Even the trustees of the museum and Parramatta Council learnt of the idea from reading about it in the newspapers. Throughout the whole process persons with significant museum qualifications and experience have been excluded from decision-making: there remain no such people among the trustees, none in the design process for the Parramatta building, and we have found none among the Department of Premier and Cabinet and other Government instrumentalities with carriage of the project. We have found no suitably qualified persons in such firms as Johnstaff and ARUP, who have done much of the work preparing the various Business Cases.

4. This state of affairs has continued: There has never been any later consultation or research into alternatives to moving the Powerhouse Museum to the site chosen by the Government in Parramatta. Sham consultations since mid-2017 have typically consisted of asking people what they wanted to see in the new museums and asking for suggestions about the use of the Ultimo site. Another strategy for mock consultation is selection of responses to suit the result required by the Government.

5. 'Moving' the Powerhouse is a very bad idea. Of all possible projects for enhancing the cultural facilities of Western Sydney, it is hard to find one that is more expensive, more destructive and more inefficient: The largest objects have to be the last out of Ultimo and the first into any new building at Parramatta, with consequent massive costs for storage and transit. There will be a considerable resultant time delay, unnecessary with almost any other project. The specially strengthened floors (for supporting heavy exhibits) and ceiling (for suspending aircraft and other similar items), as well as the extensive steam reticulation network, will be wasted at Ultimo and have to be replicated at considerable cost at Parramatta.

This process wastes, at the very least, some hundreds of millions of dollars above what would be required for any other cultural / educational project.

6. The magnificent soaring galleries of the existing building cannot be replicated in Parramatta within the proposed new building. The proposed site is smaller than the Ultimo site, and even now we are not clear on how much commercial non-

museum operations will impinge on the core operations of the museum. A further complication the unanimously expressed desire of Parramatta Council for the retention of heritage buildings on the site. The unresearched decision to include a Planetarium within the museum (now largely abandoned) added further difficulties.

7. The currently planned process involves a massive degradation of the Ultimo site, again for the purpose of building commercial / residential towers to assist budgeting. There is a calculable value of heritage in institutions such as the Powerhouse Museum, and this has been totally ignored by the Government. The July 4 2020 announcement that three iconic items would be retained at Ultimo and that the museum would remain open, but there has been no diminution in the process of removing items from the Powerhouse Museum and no guarantee that the Harwood Building and the 1988 additions will be retained.

8. The proposal has been the subject of almost universal criticism. The Government was forced to hold two Legislative Council Inquiries. Both attracted over 150 relevant submissions. Apart from the Government submissions only two organisations gave even qualified support for the 'move'. All other submissions from organisations (including the National Trust) completely opposed it. Of the over 100 individual submissions, some from very highly qualified people, none supported the 'move'. Non-Government witnesses were universally condemnatory of the idea. The *Save the Powerhouse* Facebook page exemplifies the views of the general public with over 20,000 people involved in active support. Mr Baird, asked at the Inquiry to name one arts group in favour of the move, did not do so even when given three weeks to research the topic. We, also, cannot find a legitimate grass-roots organisation that recommends the 'move'.

9. The site chosen by the Government had been specifically rejected by the elected council prior to its dissolution to enable forced council amalgamation. The land deal was finalised by the unelected administrator, and has only recently been approved by the Parramatta Council, Resolution 2790 which only passed by the Mayor's casting vote, a later rescission motion being only narrowly lost. The 'Fleet Street' precinct has a very strong level of support as an alternative.

Additional material November 2020

10. The Government has changed the Business Case 'Base Case' criterion. This certainly makes scrutiny of the fundamental 'move' idea very difficult. The Base Case is *what happens if the status quo is maintained* as per TPP 08-5 section 4.2. Logically, this should be the situation of the museum prior to the Government decision of November 2014 but on 2 September 2018 we were advised that the Government had changed the Base Case to the Government's decision to 'move' the museum. We have constantly sought details of the process, rationale and legality of this decision without any response.

11. The Government has falsely claimed that the total project has been properly overseen by independent review panels and peer review process. The Peer Review process has been comprehensively shown to be false information. There was no oversight as described by Mr Harwin on 29 August 2017. Despite comprehensive enquiries, including a GIPA application, no information at all is available about the formation, composition, processes and findings of the claimed six independent review panels. There is no sign of their influence in any released document. We have been able to identify no members of any panel, and the Government has refused even to list the qualifications and verify the independence of the panel participants. Everything is 'cabinet in confidence' beyond the names and dates (month only) of the panels: **#1:** December 2016 – MAAS review report; **#2** February 2017 - MAAS New Museum in Parramatta review report; **#3:** January 2018 - New Museum in Parramatta report; **#4:** March 2018 - New Museum in Western Sydney report **#5:** April 2018 - MAAS Ultimo report **#6:** - November 2018 - New Museum in Parramatta report.

This leads to the major overarching problem, that of excessive secrecy from this Government throughout the whole period of this process. What information we do have indicates that this project will be destructive of world-class heritage, hugely expensive, and unless halted, will waste hundreds of millions of dollars in producing an outcome far inferior to what could otherwise be obtained by rational evaluation and decision-making process. This view is so widely held that any imputation that the process is a reaction by inner city silvertails against cultural progress in the western suburbs is a ridiculous slander.

Additional material February 2022

13. On July 4 2021 it was announced that the Powerhouse Museum would be saved from imminent closure. The (very welcome) decision was made, as usual, by a small Government group and decided over a period of about 48 hours.. The CEO and trustees were informed of the decision, not consulted.

14. On 15 June, 2021 it was announced that \$500 million was allocated to an overhaul of the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo with an emphasis on fashion and design. The museum continues to be stripped out, and it there are rumours that it has been decided that the museum will be closed by 2024 for major alterations. There is still no evidence of input from people with museum qualifications and experience in such basic decisions. Consultations are under way, ostensibly to inform the development of a conservation management plan which seems to have been largely pre-empted by previous autocratic decisions.