

NSW Government response

Final report of the Select Committee on the Government's Management of the Powerhouse and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales, 2022

NSW is recognised as leader in arts and creativity. We nurture our creative industries through advocacy, sector investments and capacity building opportunities, and our state's artists are in demand both nationally and internationally.

Locally, we introduce the world to the best of NSW arts and culture by creating spaces where meaningful dialogue can occur, where artists can test new ideas, and creativity and innovation is showcased.

A staple of any globally recognised creative sector is world-class and fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure. The NSW Government is committed to ensuring all regional and metropolitan communities of NSW have access to great arts and culture, benefitting from the myriad opportunities it brings – whether that be through job creation, economic growth or happier, healthier and more cohesive communities.

The renewal of the Powerhouse Museum is one of the most significant and ambitious cultural infrastructure projects in Australian history. The new Powerhouse Parramatta, the transformation of Powerhouse Ultimo, the expansion of Powerhouse Castle Hill (Museums Discovery Centre) and the digitisation of the Powerhouse collection are once-in-a-generation opportunities to transform and renew one of Australia's oldest and most important cultural institutions. In doing so, the NSW Government is enhancing public access and appreciation of our state's important creative and industrial history while providing pathways for people to engage with our future.

New South Wales' theatres, music venues, museums and galleries are renowned across the world. However, there are historic geographic inequities in people's access to these vital cultural facilities. The NSW Government has boldly committed to building Powerhouse Parramatta, the first major Cultural Institution to be located in Western Sydney. Not only will this provide economic and social benefits to the region, Powerhouse Parramatta will provide opportunities for more people to work in the arts cultural sector if they wish.

The consultation on the Powerhouse Museum renewal has been extensive and thorough, and the project is being developed and delivered in true partnership with both local and creative communities. The success of the Powerhouse's philanthropic campaign evidences the support and excitement for all Powerhouse projects, and the enormous value the community places on this investment.

Since its inception, the Powerhouse has been intrinsically connected to both community and industry. Through its renewal, the Museum will enhance its role as a vital community resource by providing even greater access to the Powerhouse collection, of which only 10 per cent has been seen publicly in the last 30 years.

With more than 500,000 objects under its custodianship, the Powerhouse is recognised internationally as one of the great repositories of national achievement in applied arts and sciences. The collection provides a comprehensive insight into our country's rich and diverse history, and no museum in Australia is better placed to demonstrate the impact of modern advances in technology, innovation, design and engineering on daily life.

The Powerhouse is a world class museum centred on the care, preservation and exhibition of the Powerhouse collection. Powerhouse Ultimo and Parramatta will become the civic centres of their communities, with both museums connecting exhibition and public spaces to their respective CBDs. This will enhance public access and expose new audiences to dynamic cultural programming.

To ensure all community objectives are delivered, clear governance and accountability structures are embedded within the project's delivery, including regular independent review and monitoring through the NSW Government's infrastructure gateway and assurance processes.

The Committee was provided with extensive evidence by government representatives and international experts including those with proven experience delivering complex projects, flood mitigation, architecture, design and engineering for museums; yet the findings of the final inquiry report do not accord with this evidence and testimony.

The evidence presented to the Inquiry strongly disputed any suggestion that visitors to the museum will be unsafe or the collection will be damaged. This was clearly reflected in the detailed technical work undertaken by government and articulated in many specialists' submissions.

Powerhouse Parramatta will be a safe building for people to visit and for the museum's collection to be exhibited. The care and conservation of the museum's collection is paramount across all aspects of the renewal and is supported by dedicated expert staff who are implementing assessment and planning frameworks to manage risks.

Construction of Powerhouse Parramatta has commenced and is on track for completion by the end of 2024. Planning for the renewal of Powerhouse Ultimo is underway and a national design competition has commenced, with five architectural and design teams shortlisted. The winner will be announced by the end of 2022.

The NSW Government will continue to deliver these important projects for the great benefit of the people of NSW.

The NSW Government appreciates the work of the Committee and thanks all witnesses who appeared before the inquiry, and those organisations, groups and individuals that took the time to make submissions to this inquiry.

Finding	Response
<p>Finding 1</p> <p>That the NSW Government's removal of Willow Grove from its original site has had a significant and cumulative heritage impact.</p>	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>All work to dismantle and store Willow Grove has been undertaken in accordance with the approved Powerhouse Parramatta State Significant Development consent conditions and the updated Willow Grove Relocation Framework and Methodology Plan. As part of the First Nations Engagement Summary Report – Appendix G of the Consultation Report, consultation with local indigenous groups was undertaken. This included traditional custodians, knowledge holders and representatives from the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council.</p> <p>Prior to dismantling, the condition of Willow Grove was extensively recorded including through archival recording, video recording and point cloud survey. Extensive cataloguing and drawings were also undertaken.</p>
<p>Finding 2</p> <p>That, when or if the NSW Government reconstructs Willow Grove on its new site, the resulting structure will not be the same Willow Grove</p>	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>All work will be in accordance with the updated Willow Grove Relocation Framework and Methodology Plan. The NSW Government is committed to the restoration and activation of Willow Grove to ensure it can be both appreciated and utilised by the community.</p>
<p>Finding 3</p> <p>That the NSW Government's current plans for Powerhouse Parramatta are more akin to an events centre than a museum.</p>	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>The Powerhouse Parramatta is a museum of applied arts and sciences.</p> <p>The Powerhouse Parramatta is adjacent to the Parramatta River, and connected to the civic link providing access to visitors from the river to the city. Through its design, the museum will provide for a wide range of civic</p>

	<p>activities to reflect the stories and culture of Western Sydney, and provide maximum benefit and cultural experiences to residents and visitors.</p> <p>This finding has no basis in fact and is based on conjecture and misinformation. In no way does it reflect the extensive evidence provided in inquiry hearings and submissions.</p> <p>Powerhouse Parramatta is the largest investment in cultural infrastructure since the Sydney Opera House, and the first major NSW cultural institution to be established in Western Sydney. It will be the largest museum in NSW, at over 30,000 square metres including 18,000 square metres of exhibition and public space. The scale and proportion of spaces at Powerhouse Parramatta relative to the square meterage has been benchmarked and is proportionate in scale with leading international museums.</p> <p>Powerhouse Parramatta will deliver dynamic applied arts and sciences programming including outstanding local and international exhibitions and education and community programs featuring the Powerhouse collection.</p> <p>Powerhouse Parramatta will increase access to culture for all and reflect the diverse communities of Greater Sydney.</p>
<p>Finding 4</p> <p>That the NSW Government's plan to break up the museum's collections and strip items of context will diminish their significance as collections and adversely impact their interpretation.</p>	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>The collection is not being broken up.</p> <p>The Powerhouse collection is comprised of over 500,000 objects across the applied arts and sciences. For the first time in the museum's history, the collection will be consolidated at one site and co-located with the collections professionals responsible for its care.</p>



	<p>Visitors to the Powerhouse museums will have unprecedented access to its vast collections across science, technology, fashion and engineering.</p> <p>The Powerhouse Museum will continue to create exhibitions that use objects within the collection to tell stories of the applied arts and sciences. These exhibitions will be presented at Parramatta, Ultimo, Castle Hill and Sydney Observatory. The exhibitions will be curated to interpret and contextualise the objects in the collection.</p>
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Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 1</p> <p>That, given the removal of Willow Grove has already taken place despite widespread community opposition, the NSW Government commit to honouring the memory of Willow Grove by erecting a Blue Plaque on its former site.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>The Blue Plaques Program celebrates a person, people or an event. Willow Grove, as a building or site, is not eligible for the Blue Plaques Program. The former site of Willow Grove may receive a Blue Plaque if it is nominated as a relevant location for a plaque about a person, people or an event.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>That the NSW Government, in retaining and adaptively reusing St George's Terrace as part of Powerhouse Parramatta, commit to retaining their original internal separations as terraces and restoring their original features.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>St George's Terrace has been retained on site and will be part of Powerhouse Parramatta.</p> <p>The interiors of St George's Terrace have been heavily modified by previous renovations and commercial utilisation. Ongoing detailed design development will focus on retaining its remaining heritage façade and incorporating the terrace meaningfully into the museum's operations.</p> <p>The recently approved Planning Modification #1 detailed the planned adaptive reuse of St George's Terrace. The modification retains the existing façade, allows for the preservation of the heritage fabric and provides for the adaptive reuse of the building.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>That, in implementing the flood-related conditions of consent issued as part of the State Significant Development Application determination, the NSW Government:</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Flood risk has been a key consideration throughout the planning and design development processes, in line with Parramatta Council's Development Control Plan requirements for Parramatta CBD buildings.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - address all outstanding flood-related issues and concerns highlighted by the detailed analyses submitted in evidence to this inquiry; and - re-test the flood immunity of the Powerhouse Parramatta (both riverine and overland flooding) using the new City of Parramatta Council Parramatta River flood study based on the 2019 Australian Rainfall and Runoff guidelines. 	<p>Extensive flood modelling has been conducted by international flood specialists Arup to ensure that Powerhouse Parramatta will be a safe building for people to visit and for the museum’s collection to be exhibited. This modelling has demonstrated that even in a ‘1 in 1000 year’ river flood, Powerhouse Parramatta’s ground floor would still be half a metre above flood waters.</p> <p>In addition to the flood analysis conducted by Arup, the Department of Planning and Environment commissioned an independent flood assessment by WMAWater which found Arup’s assessment to be suitable.</p> <p>The flood immunity of Powerhouse Parramatta was assessed using the draft results of the City of Parramatta Council Parramatta River flood study based on the Australian Rainfall and Runoff 2019 (ARR) Guidelines. These Guidelines have been in draft form since 2019. Re-testing against the new ARR 2019 flood study is already a part of museum design finalisation and will occur when available.</p> <p>A Flood Emergency Management Strategy will be developed prior to Powerhouse Parramatta’s opening. It will have a risk management approach and response that will focus on the safety of people and the collection.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>That the NSW Government release the Powerhouse Parramatta Final Business Case 2020 and the Ultimo Creative Industries Precinct Final Business Case 2021, as well as any other business cases, conservation</p>	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>Business cases are Cabinet in Confidence and will not be supplied. All plans that are able to be made available publicly have been provided.</p>

<p>management plans, and precinct master plans for any aspect of the project (Parramatta, Ultimo and Castle Hill) that are not already in the public domain.</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>That the NSW Government publicly and specifically outline its strategy to minimise the risk of damage posed to large and fragile items by moving them from their existing location to Powerhouse Parramatta.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>The care and preservation of the museum collection is paramount across all aspects of the Powerhouse renewal.</p> <p>Powerhouse Museum staff developed and are delivering a considered collection management, transport and storage plan as part of the Collection Relocation and Digitisation Project.</p> <p>For objects identified as high risk, including the 'Very Large Objects', an individual risk assessment and management plan has been developed.</p> <p>The Powerhouse operates within an established governance structure, which includes museum expertise and a risk management framework. Risk assessment and mitigation is an important part of everyday practice.</p> <p>The Powerhouse has existing collection storage at the Museums Discovery Centre and regularly transfers valuable objects between its sites to best suit the museum program.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>That the NSW Government, as part of the renewal of the Ultimo museum, commit to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - retaining the Harwood Building in its current form with museum-related, non commercial uses, and 	<p>Noted</p> <p>The Harwood Building belongs to the Powerhouse Museum and will be needed to provide storage, loading, staff accommodation, workshop and conservation facilities for the foreseeable future. It is not included in the scope of the Powerhouse Ultimo Renewal.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - investigate the feasibility of adapting its storage spaces to better facilitate public access to collections in 'display storage' conditions. 	<p>The expansion of Powerhouse Castle Hill (Museums Discovery Centre) will deliver a new 7,871sqm building, providing state-of-the-art facilities for the future storage and care of the Powerhouse Collection. The purpose-built spaces will have a storage capacity of approximately 4,000sqm – larger than the existing 3,185sqm facilities at the Harwood Building, enabling the museum to continue its important work collecting, preserving and documenting the applied arts and sciences, and expanding community-specific collecting and custodianship.</p> <p>Powerhouse Castle Hill will be the home to more than 500,000 objects from the Powerhouse collection when not on display at Powerhouse Ultimo, Powerhouse Parramatta or Sydney Observatory and will be the first time in the museum’s history that the collection is consolidated on one site. The expansion, which is being built in accordance with international museum design and conservation standards, also includes workshop space, offices, conservation and treatment facilities.</p> <p>It will also increase access to the Powerhouse collection with new spaces for visible storage, research and viewing the collection, as well as flexible spaces for education and public programs, workshops, exhibitions and events.</p> <p>The NSW Government will work with the Powerhouse to define the Harwood Building’s future use for creative purposes.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>That the NSW Government progress, on a priority basis, the National Trust of Australia nomination to list the entire Ultimo site on the State Heritage Register and</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>The Ultimo Power House was listed on the State Heritage Register in September 2020.</p>

<p>make representations to the Heritage Council of NSW to flag this as a government priority.</p>	<p>The Wran and Harwood buildings are not included on any statutory heritage register for local or state significance and are not listed on the City of Sydney LEP.</p> <p>The Wran Building has been altered significantly since 1988, particularly during the 2011-13 revitalisation project. The Government understands the Heritage Council will consider the National Trust's nomination through due process.</p> <p>A new Draft Conservation Management Plan has been developed to inform the ongoing maintenance and renewal of the museum, to ensure heritage listed buildings are appropriately celebrated, integrated and conserved.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>That the NSW Government review the current funding arrangements for regional museums and galleries, with consideration of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how to ensure greater certainty of funding for regional museums and galleries, and - whether a library funding model would be an appropriate way to fund regional museums and galleries in New South Wales. 	<p>Noted</p> <p>The NSW Government invests in regional museums and galleries through the Arts and Cultural Funding Program (ACFP).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding is available for regional museums and galleries to support operational costs, annual programs and projects. • The ACFP proposals are assessed by a Museums and History Artform Board which ensures dedicated funding to this sector on the basis of merit. • Create NSW invests in Museums and Galleries NSW and Regional Arts Development Organisations through negotiated funded arrangements. This includes the delivery of devolved funding programs to regional museums and galleries. <p>Create NSW is developing a Museums Strategy which will inform future funding rounds and investment in regional museums and galleries across NSW.</p>



Recommendation 9

That the NSW Government develop a statewide museum and galleries strategy, which should include consideration of how to improve access to state collections by regional museums and galleries.

Noted

Create NSW is undertaking a Museums Strategy to address sector issues. The agency has surveyed and consulted widely with sector experts including those managing and supporting regional museums and NSW Aboriginal Cultural Centres and Keeping Places, to understand their priority needs and concerns.