

**Submission  
No 12**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

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This submission calls for the Powerhouse Museum to be retained at its existing location in Ultimo. Here are the reasons for this position:

- **Cost.** The cost of moving the museum's vast, world-class collection is enormous (taxpayers could pay up to \$1 billion), and many items could potentially be damaged in the process. These are not simply little objects that are easily housed in boxes. There are large technological pieces: spacecraft, aeroplanes, heritage items from railway stations and cinemas, etc. There are also extremely fragile historical pieces that need as little light and movement as possible, to preserve them (e.g. glass plate negatives). The funds that would be spent on such a shift would be better spent on other cultural projects in Western Sydney (perhaps a Museum of Western Sydney? ... which was allegedly the rationale for moving the Powerhouse in the first place). So there is no "business case", it is financially irresponsible move. Furthermore, once that land is sold off, it's gone for good, which is very short-term thinking.
- **Community:** the Powerhouse Museum has a long history in Ultimo, beginning as the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences at what is now Sydney TAFE. Since 1988 the Powerhouse has cemented a meaningful role in the Ultimo community, and it is often the location of community meetings. Communities thrive on diversity, and that means diversity in terms of land use, not just people. A neighbourhood that is almost exclusively made up of small rented apartments is not a diverse neighbourhood. Ultimo has a very specific historical and contemporary identity that is tied up with its background as a working class suburb and the educational and cultural institutions that it houses. The Powerhouse is a vital part of that. The Powerhouse brings foot-traffic, events, children, scientific and design expertise and fun to the suburb. To rip the Powerhouse out of Ultimo is to further damage the suburb, turning it into a bland, high-rise filled, over-pass-covered, traffic-clogged wind-tunnel, with very few redeeming features.
- **Heritage and architecture:** There is clear heritage value in the original Ultimo Powerhouse building, the tram sheds, the old post office building and the postmodern structure built around it. The 1988 Powerhouse Museum building, while a little dysfunctional and definitely idiosyncratic, is a meaningful example of 1980s postmodern architecture, and that has value in and of itself. The Powerhouse has managed these heritage matters respectfully and in a way that balances well with the existing urban environment. Of course, the building needs some refurbishment, and the Powerhouse was mid-way through this renovation process when the giant "move" was announced.
- **Urban amenity.** The Goods Line should lead to a cultural precinct, not to some apartments. The Goods Line was a brilliant urban development! It facilitates foot and cycling traffic from Central right into Ultimo – and this was something that was much needed (Harris Street is awful for walkers and cyclists). There was a time when everyone was talking about "linkages", which we hoped would result in meaningful urban design that wasn't just

about building large structures, but considered the desirable foot/cycling patterns between Central, Ultimo and Darling Harbour. Other than the Goods Line, there is little evidence of this happening. And yet the Goods Line – being right next to a Frank Gehry building, will attract international visitors and locals alike. It would make sense for those visitors to be able to do and see other things in the area, other than just walking along a path to nowhere in particular.

- **Linkages with educational institutions.** The Powerhouse is regularly involved in meaningful collaborations with UTS and TAFE, among other institutions. The physical proximity of these institutions to the Powerhouse is an important part of why these research and exhibition collaborations come about. Furthermore, the Powerhouse’s collections are often used in educational settings – students are often sent there to check out collections, meet with curators, access the collections in storage, use research material, etc. So the removal of the Powerhouse in Ultimo would be a major loss for UTS and TAFE.

May I also repeat the concerns of the Save the Powerhouse group:

- The proposed location – a flood prone carpark in Parramatta
- The total lack of genuine community consultation
- Parramatta residents don’t want a “cut-down” Powerhouse, they deserve top-class cultural institutions of their choosing
- Secrecy of the chaotic (so-called) “planning process”.

Sincerely,

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