

Submission
No 46

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: National Trust of Australia

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The Director
Standing Committee 4: Upper House Inquiry into Museums and Galleries
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Director,

Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) makes the following submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in respect of the proposal to sell the Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo and the Museum's proposed move to Parramatta and whether there are alternative strategies to support museum development (Inquiry Terms of Reference {e}).

In June, 2015 the Ultimo Power House was listed on the National Trust Register and in July 2105 the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo was listed on the National Trust Register.

In November 2015 the Ultimo Power House (Powerhouse Museum) was nominated for Listing on the State Heritage Register.

In the Trust's view, this State Heritage Register listing proposal met six of the seven possible listing criteria.

The assessment of the heritage significance under the Heritage Council criteria of state significance were as follows: -

- A. The place is important in the course or pattern of the cultural or natural history of New South Wales because It was the first large state-owned electricity generating station in NSW and the original generating station for the supply of electricity to power the electric tramway network throughout Sydney.

It was one of the largest and most important generating stations in NSW for many years and has associations with the electrification of the suburban tramway and railway systems and with the general reticulation of electrical power in Sydney.

It was the site where most major technological advancements in electrical generation, including steam turbines and large-scale, alternating-current generation, were trialled by NSW electricity authorities.

The station also played a major part in the development of the Ultimo/Pymont area.

The Ultimo Power House was adapted to house the Museum of Applied Arts and Technology (later, the Powerhouse Museum), the principal museum of technology, manufacturing, science and craft in NSW and retains the historical, aesthetic and cultural associations of this Museum dating back to the International Exhibition in the late nineteenth century. It is an ongoing repository for the exhibition of the finest examples of the skill and industry of the country and has an educational and research role in these areas as part of its operation.



- B. The place has a strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons of importance in the cultural or natural history of NSW because the Ultimo Power House is associated with the Museum of Applied Arts and Technology (later, the Powerhouse Museum), the principal museum of technology, manufacturing, science and craft in NSW and retains the historical, aesthetic and cultural associations of this Museum dating back to the International Exhibition in the late nineteenth century.

The place is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and / or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in New South Wales because the power station buildings are a landmark group of buildings which relate closely to the visual and architectural industrial context of the area. The Boilerhouse building was, in its day, one of the largest brickwork structures in the state and the chimneys were significant Sydney landmarks for seventy years.

Furthermore, the adaptive work undertaken for the station's conversion to the Powerhouse Museum is significant both for its successful re-use of the buildings and successful integration of old and new buildings; the new building was awarded the Sulman Medal by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in 1988.

- C. The place is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and / or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in New South Wales because the power station buildings are a landmark group of buildings which relate closely to the visual and architectural industrial context of the area. The Boilerhouse building was, in its day, one of the largest brickwork structures in the state and the chimneys were significant Sydney landmarks for seventy years.

Furthermore, the adaptive work undertaken for the station's conversion to the Powerhouse Museum is significant both for its successful re-use of the buildings and successful integration of old and new buildings; the new building was awarded the Sulman Medal by the RAI in 1988.

- D. The place has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in New South Wales for social, cultural or spiritual reasons because the Ultimo Power House was adapted to house the Museum of Applied Arts and Technology (later, the Powerhouse Museum) and it retains the historical, aesthetic and cultural associations of this Museum dating back to the International Exhibition in the late nineteenth century.

In this context, it has social significance for many Sydneysiders for whom the Powerhouse Museum represents an important educational and cultural experience and a communal commitment to honouring the past and those who have been significant in the evolution of modern Australian society. It does not appear to meet this criterion of State significance.

- E. Not applicable.

- F. The place possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the cultural or natural history of New South Wales because the Ultimo Power House and the White Bay Power Station are the only major survivors of the city-based electrical generating stations of the early twentieth century. They separately and together are significant relics of the early development of electricity generation in NSW and are important physical evidence of the scale and importance of this industry.

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places / environments in New South Wales because in its size, layout and surviving physical features, it is representative of large state-owned electricity generating stations from the early twentieth century in NSW and elsewhere in Australia.



The conversion of the Power Station into a cultural institution is itself representative of a change of use for redundant power stations which is typical of these structures world-wide.

The position of the National Trust is –

- The Trust strongly opposes the sale by the NSW Government of the Powerhouse Museum for redevelopment and would also strongly oppose any demolition of the existing historic structure, the purpose built 1988 extension and extant components that demonstrate the Powerhouse's original use.
- The Trust supports the establishment of a Parramatta Branch of the museum with its own distinctive function and style but strongly opposes the closure of the Powerhouse Museum.
- Whereas the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum concentrates on technology, a Parramatta Museum could feature the decorative arts and design collection along the lines of the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington, London. Britain's Natural History Museum began as an annex of the British Museum but has now forged its own identity.
- The Powerhouse Museum belongs in its Ultimo context where it is a vital part of an education and innovation precinct. It is easily accessed via the Goods Line Walkway, light rail, Darling Harbour and existing public transport.
- Nowhere else in the world are governments moving major museums away from the heart of a major city. Instead they are building satellite museums from the collections of their great museums. The Powerhouse has the collections to create an original new museum for Western Sydney without selling its Ultimo home.
- The National Trust supports the development of a distinctive 'cultural beacon' in Parramatta. But to transport a pared-back, small scale Powerhouse would be a great mistake. Western Sydney deserves far better – a unique museum, shaped by community consultation, one that reflects the history, achievements and cultural diversity of the region and the aspirations of its people.
- The Ultimo Power House was magnificently repurposed just 30 years ago as a world class museum. Since it opened in 1988 the museum building and its exhibitions have won many awards. The project was a major investment for the people of New South Wales. The value of this investment will be wasted if the museum's site is sold to developers.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Quint
Director - Advocacy