

**Submission  
No 64**

**INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF  
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND  
CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** City of Sydney

**Date Received:** 15 May 2020

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Submission to:  
Legislative Council Select Committee on the  
Government's Management of the  
Powerhouse Museum and Other Museum  
and Cultural Projects  
in New South Wales



## Introduction

The Powerhouse Museum is significant to the City of Sydney's cultural, social, scientific, industrial and economic history and heritage. The City of Sydney has consistently opposed the removal of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and its collections from its site in Ultimo.

The City of Sydney supports the expansion of cultural facilities in western and south-western Sydney that reflect the areas' heritage and contemporary communities.

These two positions are not mutually exclusive. Both outcomes can be achieved.

However, should the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences be relocated, the City of Sydney strongly advocates for the retention and continued use of the Ultimo Powerhouse site for cultural and creative purposes.

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## Terms of Reference

That a select committee be established to inquire into and report on:

- a. The proposed move of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Powerhouse Museum, from Ultimo to Parramatta
  - b. The Government's management of all museums and cultural projects in New South Wales
  - c. Any other related matter.
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## Attachments

- a. Resolution of Council, 6 April 2020, Item 12.6, Powerhouse Museum.
- b. Making Space for Culture in Sydney, 2020, Cultural Infrastructure Study, City of Sydney.

## Submission

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### a. The proposed move of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Powerhouse Museum, from Ultimo to Parramatta

The Powerhouse Museum is a remarkable institution, comprising a collection of cultural artefacts (some of world significance) contained within a purpose-built complex including the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings dating from 1899. The museum project was designed by the Government Architect's Office and when completed in 1988, the Powerhouse Museum won the Sir John Sulman Medal, the (then) highest award offered by the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects.

The transformation of a building which was central to Sydney's industrial past into a building which celebrates and preserves our technological and industrial heritage and history is a shining example of adaptive re-use merging with historical and cultural relevance. The Powerhouse Museum is a site and a collection which is valued by Sydney citizens and by the broader community.

The area around the Powerhouse is located within a growing centre for education, media and the creative and digital industries. Within Haymarket, Pyrmont and Ultimo, there are 7,562 people employed in the Creative Industries, and a further 7,588 in the Information and Communications Technology sector. This equates to around 22% of creative and digital jobs in our City.

On 6 April, 2020, the Council of the City of Sydney resolved to reaffirm its strong opposition to the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum from its Ultimo site and the sale or repurposing of the site for other uses, and strong advocacy for the continued use of the site for cultural and creative purposes. A copy of the Council Resolution is attached to this submission.

If the NSW Government proceeds with plans for the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum, the City notes the site provides a significant strategic opportunity to help secure new economic, tourism, cultural and educational opportunities as a result of the precinct's current transformation and the co-location of spaces for research and development, production and innovation. Both the Greater Sydney Commission's Eastern City District and the City of Sydney's Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement prioritise the development of an Innovation and Technology Precinct connecting Pyrmont, Ultimo, Haymarket, Chippendale and Camperdown. A commitment to delivering this strategy has been complemented by the City's investment in the new Darling Exchange facility in Darling Square.

The Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo is strategically positioned to benefit from and contribute to this developing precinct. Therefore, if the NSW Government continues with plans to relocate the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the City of Sydney strongly advocates for continued use of the Ultimo site for cultural and creative purposes.

The State Government's Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025 commits to investing in a cultural industries precinct in Ultimo, stating that "*the precinct will be a home for fashion, design and cultural exchange ... including a new museum and a 1500 seat Broadway style theatre for state of the art performance space for musicals, live music and screen based programming.*" (pg75).

In the cultural sector survey undertaken for the Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025 (p44), respondents rated the importance of cultural infrastructure needs as follows:

- 86.2% space to rehearse or develop an artistic practice
- 85.9% exhibition space

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- 84.7% flexible space to hire to collaborate with peers

The industrial heritage spaces and mixed-use zoning of the Powerhouse site offer ideal opportunities for the State Government to deliver a cultural production hub in the Ultimo Innovation Precinct for the manufacture, production, education and demonstration of diverse creative specialisations and products. The focus could reflect employment practices and supply chains of the Powerhouse Museum site such as object and architectural design, set design, textile production, rehearsal, curation and research for Australian cultural content.

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## b. The Government's management of all museums and cultural projects in New South Wales

The challenges facing the Powerhouse Museum are challenges faced by many museums across Sydney and New South Wales. Making the collections of our cultural institutions more accessible should be the goal of all of the state's museums, be they in community or government hands.

The City of Sydney support the Local Government NSW recommendation that the NSW Government should devise a Museum Strategy "with sufficient resources to ensure cultural heritage led vibrancy, collection care and local storytelling initiatives are supported, developed and maintained for communities throughout the State" (LGSA NSW Conference 2018). Such a strategy would guide the prioritisation of infrastructure developments, sustainable resources and vibrant programming to ensure that local stories are documented and made accessible to future generations.

This could support many opportunities for collaboration across cultural institutions and encourage access and equity through digitalisation and inclusion of diverse voices and stories. The strategy should cover the whole GLAM sector – Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums – and put the valuing of local history and community stories at the centre of our cultural collections through the key areas of acquisition, access and presentation.

Concurrently, there is another parliamentary inquiry looking into the review of the State Records Act. The policy reform being driven by NSW Government in that inquiry is a desire to "deliver richer, more heterogeneous stories about our social, historical, and cultural identity". This is a policy outcome that is applicable for many of the state's cultural institutions, including the Powerhouse Museum, the Australian Museum, the State Library of NSW, and the Art Gallery of NSW, as well as the State Archives and Sydney Living Museums.

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## c. Related matter, Making Space for Culture in Sydney

*Making Space for Culture in Sydney, 2020*, is a Cultural Infrastructure Study undertaken by the City of Sydney. The study identifies a loss of over 100,000 square metres of cultural infrastructure across the City of Sydney area in the past ten years, correlating with a retraction in industry growth and a narrowing of the cultural workforce. The study outlines the significant economic and social impacts of a decline in cultural infrastructure in Sydney.

The study examines various government and market-led innovations in the provision of cultural infrastructure and recommends an urgent coordinated approach across all levels of government, private landholders, commercial developers and the community to safeguard existing cultural infrastructure and generate additional infrastructure to meet the needs of our changing city.

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In considering advantageous future uses of the Ultimo Powerhouse site, it is recommended that the inquiry committee review the *Making Space for Culture in Sydney* cultural infrastructure study. The study is provided as an attachment to this submission.

