

Submission  
No 135

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

**Organisation:** North Parramatta Residents' Action Group

**Date Received:** 17 May 2020

---

The North Parramatta Residents Action Group has been actively campaigning against the proposal to move the Powerhouse Museum out of Ultimo to Parramatta since it was announced in 2015. This proposal completely ignores the community vision for a world class arts and cultural precinct to be set amongst the garden ground of the 30ha Fleet Street Heritage Precinct (also known as the Cumberland Hospital East Precinct) containing the world heritage worthy Female Factory which was placed on the National Heritage List in 2017.

NPRAG and our members position which has remained consistent over the past 4 years has been that we seek the State government direct their cultural funding commitment made to Western Sydney to create a Museum in Parramatta that will celebrate the narratives of our first nations peoples and the subsequent stories of forced migration (convicts) to free migration to reflect our diverse western Sydney population. And for the site not to be on Parramatta Riverbank but amongst the 30ha state government owned Fleet Street Heritage Precinct in North Parramatta.

We welcome the government's commitment to equity for western Sydney with cultural funding but believe it's the wrong museum and the wrong location. For less money than the projected \$1.5 billion more can be delivered to Parramatta that would protect and enhance our existing narratives of indigenous and non indigenous built and environmental heritage sites.

We do not support the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo closing down to be transferred in some other capacity to Western Sydney. Our population growth forecasts demand that we should be adding to our cultural assets not removing them and relocating to another area.

We do not support the demolition of Parramatta local heritage buildings WillowGrove and St Georges Terraces. In 2018 we obtained in a little over a week more than 13,000 signatures online calling the Premier, Arts Minister and Parramatta council Lord Mayor to retain these significant and much loved buildings.

**North Parramatta Residents Action Group**

**Spokesperson – Suzette Meade**

We wish to address the following:

1. CONSULTATION
2. HERITAGE DESTRUCTION ON PHILLIP STREET PARRAMATTA
3. FLOODING AND CONSTRAINTS OF PROPOSED SITE
4. ALTERNATIVE VISION/SITE
5. FLEET STREET HERITAGE PRECINCT STATUS

Appendix 1 – March Online Survey by Infrastructure NSW

Appendix 2 – Raw Data from 2017 Dept of Planning 'The MAAS Project' Parramatta and Ultimo

Appendix 3 – Letter to INSW, Meeting Request Planning Minister, Letter to Premier, Letter to Transport Minister, Letter to Planning Minister, Parramatta Council Letters to Minister re WillowGrove

Appendix 4 – Historical Floods on Riverbank – Media Archives

## CONSULTATION

The only community consultation that has taken place with the community in Parramatta to genuinely gain knowledge of what cultural facility the community in Parramatta desire has been the two events below -

### July 26<sup>th</sup> 2017 - The MAAS Project – Public Meeting Parramatta (held by Dept of Planning)

#### EVENT DESCRIPTION (via EventBrite)

*The NSW Government is working with the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) to build a truly iconic museum in Western Sydney.*

***The New Museum will be designed with community input** and will be on the cutting edge of science and innovation. The preferred site for the New Museum is the Riverbank site in the heart of Parramatta.*

*To deliver the best possible Museum, a business case has been established to ensure all options are investigated, tested and analysed. The business case has been expanded to include an arts and cultural space in Ultimo that considers keeping some MAAS presence at the current Powerhouse Museum site.*

*Community consultation is an important element of the business case and we invite you to be part of the conversation.*

*Two public meetings will be held:*

*Wednesday 26 July*

*6:30pm – 8:00pm (Registration from 6pm)*

*PARKROYAL Parramatta*

*30 Phillip St, Parramatta NSW 2150*

*Monday 31 July*

*6:30pm – 8:00pm (Registration from 6pm)*

*Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences*

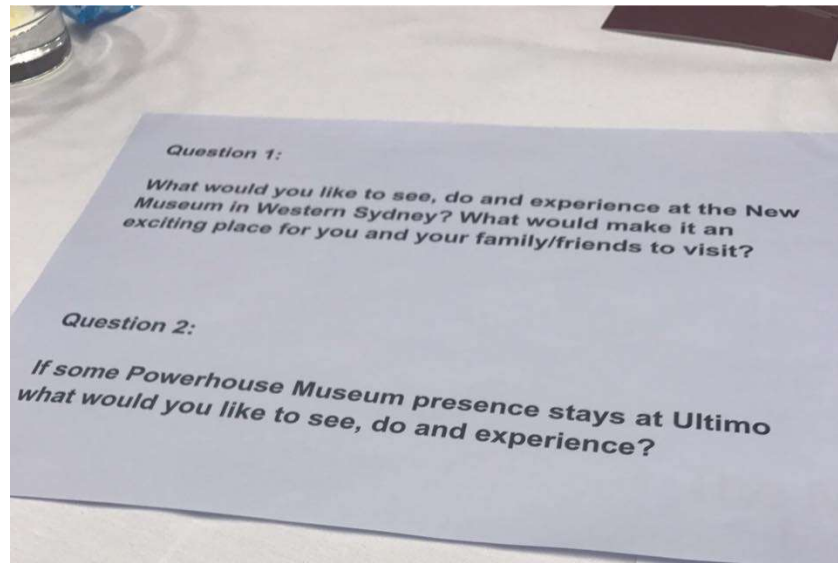
*500 Harris Street, Ultimo.*

*The public meetings will be an opportunity to hear firsthand from the project team and to ask them questions. When registering your attendance there will be an opportunity to provide your top three questions.*

*Capacity for the venue is limited, and a waitlist will be activated once event registrations are at capacity. Registrations will close 9am, 24 July.*

We were only asked two questions (see photo below placed on each table which we had to supply our answers on a DL size piece of paper provided ( please see selection of raw data from participants that was collected from the Park Royal Parramatta and the Ultimo event in Appendix 1) Please note that the Ultimo event the participants were supplied an A4 sheet of paper to provide feedback in comparison. *This information was obtained via Freedom of Information Act by ABC journalist Michaela Boland.*

From NPRAGs reading of the Elton Consulting report that formed the 2018 business case it did not truly reflect what was openly discussed in the room table sharing activity on the evening or submitted in written form on paper provided.



**March 2019** - The next round of consultation was issued during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. On March 24<sup>th</sup> 2019 we were alerted by residents that lived along O'Connell Street in North Parramatta that postcards as per below had arrived.

These advertised that due to the COVID-19 pandemic that no public consultation meetings would be held but that community should complete a survey by scanning a QR code or calling in or emailing to discuss. With no access to any documents that would allow community to review what was proposed for a museum except for artists impressions in the media, or on the postcard itself.

The community were outraged that this was sent during such a time of uncertainty in their lives and that it was so insensitive to the concerns about our local heritage buildings and limiting any true input about what type of museum we would like and where we would like it. Basically, it was window dressing nothing more.

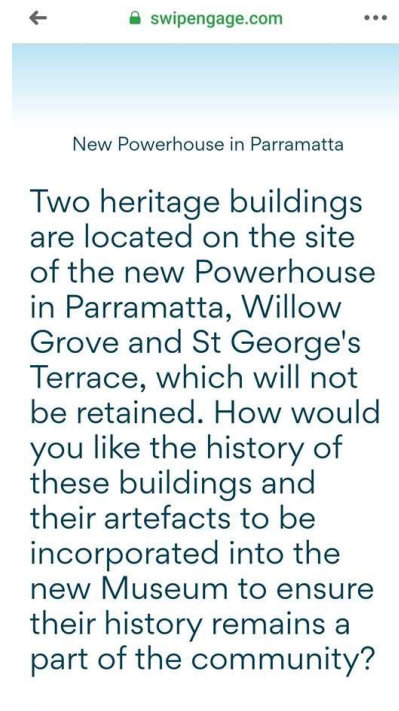


(postcard back and front issued by INSW)

NPRAG had major concerns about this on numerous levels

1. Distribution (reported by INSW to be 20,000) postcards during a pandemic lockdown. Asking people to comment on a museum during a world wide health crisis was inappropriate and insensitive.
2. The distribution appears to have not reached any residents beyond approximately a 900m radius of the proposed riverbank site. Parramatta has a population of approximately 227,000 people recorded in the 2016 census, but this population is mainly outside the CBD. A 900m radius of this site is at least half made up of commercial or retail. Keeping in mind that March 23<sup>rd</sup> commenced the advice from the State Government that people of NSW no longer go to work unless it was essential and March 25<sup>th</sup> that students stay at home.

3. The survey (attached in Appendix 2 ) was a restrictive 'push poll', with no opportunity to respond but in favour of the project with multiple choice format. There were only two questions that you were able to add your own free text and these were limited to only 250 key strokes. People felt restricted and unable to share their thoughts at all in this format.
4. The printed postcard did not state the deadline required to complete this survey.
5. The deadline to complete the survey was added to the INSW website around two weeks after it went live.
6. Approximately a week into the survey going live – it was edited with an additional question asking how the community would like to have their demolished heritage buildings represented and remembered on the site. This means that anyone that had already taken part in the survey would have not have had the opportunity to answer this question prior.



## **WEBINAR (ZOOM CONSULTATION)**

NPRAG committee members attended to public Webinars (April 7<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> held by – Lisa Havilah from Powerhouse Museum, Tom Kennedy from INSW and Kylie Cochrane hired consultant from Aurecon) we were provided a presentation with artists impressions of the museum at Parramatta and timeline of the INSW approvals and preparation of DA.

We were quite shocked to hear the language from the museum director was almost non-existent about museum or heritage of Parramatta and focussed on flexible exhibition and function event spaces and the excitement at having 40 residential units for scientists or researchers to live in during their residency with the museum, the university or Westmead Health District. Many participants were appalled at the clear lack of discussion around museum exhibitions or how any of the proposal would reflect Parramatta at all.

We were constantly told that decisions had not been made yet by Kylie Cochrane the engagement consultant and Tom Kennedy by INSW, and that this is only the governments preferred design and location and that nothing has been approved. But then Lisa Havilah told us that Parramatta Powerhouse project is in 'delivery mode' and that it was funded and moving ahead. Participants called her up on this as being a contradiction to this event being a consultation process.

There was a lot of upset people on this webinar that felt like what Parramatta wants was not being heard or even considered – all of our feedback that we don't want this museum or like the location was replied with an 'I am sorry you feel that way'.

For the sake of consistency NPRAG attended a second community webinar to see if the message was the same. We found that the presentation had changed a great deal and Ms Havilah was now calling the residential units 'artistic studio spaces' and that the buildings were made up of museum exhibition spaces would reflect the stories of Parramatta. One of the participants asked Ms Havilah directly what exactly in the exhibition collections actually relates to Western Sydney and Parramatta? Ms Havilah was excited to relay a heritage collection of Parramatta Eels jerseys and an old sign from Parramatta Road. This was extremely insulting on many levels, mostly that the person in charge of our new Museum has very little knowledge or respect for Parramatta's rich heritage and importance to NSW.

After this NPRAG sent a request for meeting on April 27<sup>th</sup> to Planning Minister Rob Stokes to outline our concerns with the consultation process but this was unanswered. We also wrote to INSW with our concerns about the timing and restrictive nature of the consultation with the community in Parramatta (Appendix 3)



## HERITAGE – WILLOWGROVE & ST GEORGES TERRACES

NPRAG in 2018 ran an on-line petition calling for the Premier to retain Willowgrove Villa and St Georges Terraces on Phillip Street Parramatta. We had over 13,000 people sign this in just over a week. Other organisations such as The National Trust (NSW Branch), Historic House Trust, Royal Australian Historic Society (RAHS) called for these buildings to be saved from demolition by the proposed Powerhouse Parramatta project.

The social significance of these buildings to the community is clearly very important – the outrage that heritage buildings that give us a sense of place and history will be demolished for a Museum when there are other sites in Parramatta that are owned by the State Government that would be more suitable makes no sense at all. Whether it be the thousands of people that were born at Willowgrove between 1920 to 1953 when it operated as a Maternity Hospital known also Estella or Nurse Davidsons Private Hospital, Westcourt Private Hospital and Aloha.

Even Lord Mayors Andrew Wilson and Bob Dyer have written to the state government expressing the desire to have these important buildings retained. (see attached letters in Appendix 3)

In February 2019 during election period after the strong public scrutiny over the threat of Willowgrove and St Georges Terraces being demolished by the proposed Powerhouse Museum plans the Premier stated “We've never said it will go as part of the Powerhouse Museum,”. “We've always said of course our intention is to save it,” Ms Berejiklian said. (source - <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/government-says-it-will-keep-properties-but-budgets-for-their-sale-20190218-p50ym0.html> )

Then the first week of December in 2019, NPRAG were advised from sources inside the government that documents in fact showed the plan was to demolish these two heritage buildings. The community couldn't believe that the government had made false promises prior to the election to protect WillowGorve and St Georges Terraces after our long and loud heritage campaign for them to be saved.

## **FLOODING AND SIZE CONSTRAINTS OF THE PROPOSED SITE**

It is a well known fact in Parramatta that when it rains the Parramatta River between the Marsden Weir and the Parramatta Rivercat Ferry Wharf floods.

This is not a modern occurrence but one that has been recorded since 1900s. The Parramatta CBD Flood Mitigation Task force was set up by Parramatta council in 1996 after residents presented a petition in late 1995 with their concerns. Members of the task force included Hydraulic Engineers, Quantity Surveyors and the now City of Parramatta Architect Kim Crestani who sat on the Design Jury for the museum building selection. (A selection of media from the Parramatta Council Heritage centre archives is in Appendix 3)

Notwithstanding the safety concerns, the swollen banks when there is heavy rainfall between Lennox Bridge and Parramatta Rivercat Ferry mean that this entire area is inaccessible. Not just during the flood but for days if not a week after with the SES and council cleaning up dangerous debris, rubbish, and mud and sand deposits on the public footpaths and grass areas.

This would mean that not only would there be damage to the museum outdoor exhibits and public grounds but would also mean the operational capabilities of the museum would be decreased whenever there was heavy rainfall with liability issues with public access to the museum or restricted access and use of the grounds.

The size constraints of the proposed site on the Riverbank also don't have a natural synergy with the current Riverside Theatres, and very little public space for large events. Already with councils events along the riverbank they are inaccessible with large crowds and quite dangerous when at capacity. It also does not allow for any growth strategy for an arts and cultural precinct for the future.

From the images that have been released it also has very little connection with the councils vision of a civic link and connection to the riverside and water.

One recurrent complaint about the suitability of the site with community has been lack of parking for the museum. Whilst INSW and Lisa Havilah have been promoting the governments great investment in public transport that will be the way for patrons to travel to the museum, it shows the clear lack of understanding of how families move about on weekends and how they travel with extended family and/or small children from the suburbs in western Sydney. Or indeed those with disability or mobility issues that can not take a metro than a light rail and walk one hundred metres to the museum entrance. Whereas the Ultimo Powerhouse museum has parking stations near by Parramatta current parking stations that serve the area will be removed for the Museum and the Metro West Station.

## **ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL – FLEET STREET HERITAGE PRECINCT**

In April 2017 the NSW government announced they would spend \$310 million dollars to revamp the North Parramatta heritage precinct's over seven to 10 years, and open up Parramatta River foreshore and build community parks and gardens.

"Parramatta has such a proud history of colonial and Indigenous history and it's wonderful that history is being rejuvenated," Ms Berejiklian said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-30/premier-allocates-300-million-for-north-parramatta/8484014>

The Premier herself knows how important and proud we are in Parramatta of the history of our first nations people and our history of the second colony that saved Sydney from starvation with its agriculture riches.

The 2017 DA lodged by UGNSW for 4000 residential units was withdrawn after years of public campaigns against the proposals and then the government in 2018 announced they had received an unsolicited bid from University of Sydney for this site to become a campus including thousands of student accommodation (units)

<https://architectureau.com/articles/university-of-sydneys-proposed-western-sydney-campus-shakes-up-plans-for-parramatta-heritage-precinct/>

We have been advised from sources inside the university that this bid has come to a halt as the State Government are pushing for the university to take responsibility for the National Heritage listed buildings and site, but the university is only interested in the 19ha state heritage listed part of the precinct.

So now this land sits in limbo once again with community watching as the Light Rail route tears up the grounds just meters from the potential world heritage listed site – with no public drawings in site (See Appendix 3 Letter to Premier/ Transport Minister/Planning Minister)

NPRAG met with former Arts minister Don Harwin in 2017 in his offices to present NPRAG alternative cultural proposal which included artist impressions for an arts and cultural precinct to be created over the state government owned 30ha Fleet Street Heritage Precinct (known also as the Cumberland Hospital East Precinct) in North Parramatta.

We also met in 2017 after the meeting in his offices with Minister Harwin and then deputy secretary of Create NSW Alex O'Mara at the 30 ha Fleet Street Heritage Precinct to discuss our community led vision for a Museum of NSW to be incorporated within the existing historic garden precinct with complementary performing arts rehearsal spaces, and river boardwalk to enhance the world heritage worthy living museum convict site of the Female Factory to become a national and international tourist drawcard. During this time Minister

Harwin agreed that the precinct was very special and would make a great location for cultural precinct.

NPRAG believe this presents a great opportunity for the NSW government to combine these two commitments to Western Sydney into one at this contiguous 30ha precinct which would cost less than the \$1.5 billion dollar Powerhouse relocation project.

It seems perfectly obvious that the place to celebrate and reflect the narrative of Parramatta, NSW and Australia would be at this pristine 30 ha estate in the Parramatta CBD.

The precinct does not get affected by floods during rainfall like the riverbank site so this would save the wastage of valuable cultural funding on flood mitigation and downtime for the museum being inaccessible due to flood waters or the clean ups that follow.

It also has the capacity due to its sheer size to allow for future growth, large crowd numbers for events, as well as provide large open green spaces for the increasing population which as we have seen during the Covid-19 lockdown how vital these outdoor public spaces are to the community more than ever.

The Parramatta Light Rail route travels through Cumberland Hospital Precinct with a planned stop on the perimeter of the grounds which would allow public transport to deliver people to the site. It also has room to allow for permeant parking for tourist coaches and public that require travel by private vehicle whether elderly or disabled patrons.

Due to its current UNESCO World Heritage campaign on the Female Factory this being successful would bring further funding to this site to assist in its ongoing maintenance and programs.

We know cultural tourists spend three times as long and spend more than any other tourist. Parramatta is in desperate need of a strong tourism industry, to draw in the international visitors numbers – and like all of the us when we visit another country we want to immerse ourselves in the culture, the history and the art and architecture. These timeless aspects of a museum is what brings people to visit and stay for a few nights in a city. This is what Parramatta needs to invest in – we need to invest in ourselves.

The Cumberland Hospital East Precinct ( also known as the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct) is home to some of the most significant heritage sites in New South Wales and Australia.

See drone footage showing the extent of the precinct  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8zO5-85pD8>

Most of it has been under continuous occupation by Europeans from the early colonial grants in the 1790s through to its continued use now as a mental health precinct for the Cumberland Hospital.

In the 1800s this site and the surrounding area saw the erection of one of Australia's :first Government Mills, A problem faced by the early settlers in Sydney and Parramatta was a lack of wind or water powered mills with which to grind cereal crops for growing colony) first botanical garden, Samuel Marsden's Mill, the second 'female factory', the colony's largest insane asylum, a Catholic Orphan School, a landscape sculpted by the Garden City Movement, and its own sandstone quarry.

The unique history of the transformation of the 'female factory' into an insane asylum, and then mental health precinct in the 1900s continues to provide us with insights into nearly 200 years of convict and medical history in Australia.

It also contains a living library of some of NSW most prominent government architects such as Greenway, Barnett, Vernon and MCrae. This is our Macquarie Street, in fact Fleet Street could be even more significant and therefore deserves the same respect and vision that the government is applying to the city of Sydneys historic areas.

This 30 ha jewel contains so much insight into how Parramatta developed during the colony and even further thousands years of history from the Darug people, with Bora Rings located to the north of the precinct and 'birthing stones' used for midwifery purposes down at the weir crossing to Wistaria Gardens and Parramatta Park.

This is a rare opportunity to create a cultural legacy for future generations which will bring together the celebration of indigenous and colonial history with contemporary creativity for the first time in Australia. A tangible, lasting reflection of reconciliation.

Over a decade we could develop- affordably- a hub for creative minds with rehearsal spaces, artist studios, community centres with a world class art gallery and museum of NSW celebrating our migration history together with the first centre of indigenous reconciliation and excellence, surrounded by an interactive-family focused sculpture park amongst renewed colonial botanical plantings.

There would be an outdoor performance space and indoor auditoria, with practice and smaller presentation rooms. There would be a connection with Parramatta Park via a foot bridge to link the government lands and the cultural ribbon along the river. All keeping this green public space accessible for the expanding population of Parramatta to both recreate and create in.

The retention of this precinct for the public is vital with burgeoning high density housing and expanding population predictions. Green open space is paramount for physical and mental health and cultural well-being and this will morph into long term economic benefits for western Sydney. This unique precinct will bring long term economic wealth to western Sydney with domestic and international tourism. For too long Victoria has surpassed NSW in multicultural celebration and community cohesion.

Having a hub where for the first time the narratives of indigenous Australia, forced migration of convict women within the full panoply of Colonial settlement and convict life through to modern day free migration, will be celebrated in one place with the deepest historical context and background. For all to learn about and enjoy the diverse tapestry of our multicultural backgrounds.

Parramatta needs the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct. It can both respond to the site's history, integrating past creativity while encouraging the creativity of all Western Sydney's present communities.

It will house incubator start-ups, museums (potentially Museum of NSW/Migration/State Collections), galleries, artist studios, community hubs, botanic and family-orientated gardens, performance spaces, cafes, etc.

The custodianship of this precinct is currently under title with Landcom but we believe that it must be managed by a Trust. With Mays Hill (part of the Parramatta Park Trust ) having over 20 hectares removed for replacement public pool in 2017 and now recently the government investigating the remaining land a future areas for the expansion of Westmead school buildings it makes it more important the North Parramatta lands be put under the Park Trust.

This is a special place, and Parramatta is very lucky to have this precinct and this government has the great opportunity to make their legacy one of listening to the people of NSW and celebrating the wonderful heritage we still have in Parramatta and stories of our history celebrated. Also being the government that made the responsible decisions fiscally to reassess the \$1.5 billion expenditure to move a museum post COVID-19 . To pass up the opportunity sitting here to create a site of reflection, education, relaxation and entertainment for a tourist driven arts and cultural industry for less than half of the proposed budget is unimageable.

We implore on all elected members of parliament to support a better and smarter vision for Parramatta.

**Artists Impressions follow that were commissioned by NPRAG in 2016 to show the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct as the site for museum, performance and arts as the future site for Parramatta's new Museum .**









