



Minutes for the Heritage Council of NSW Out of Session Meeting – 474

Agenda Item: Ultimo Tramways Power House Nomination

Location: Ultimo Tramways Power House site

Date: 12.2.2020

Amended: 21 April 2020

Attendees:

Members: Mr Frank Howarth PSM, Ms Sheridan Burke, Ms Colleen Morris, Ms Louise Thurgood, Mr Ian Clarke, Dr Nicholas Brunton, Dr Brian Lindsay, Mr Paul Knight

Apologies: Mr Dillon Kombumerri, Mr Brett Whitworth

HNSW Staff:

Ms Pauline McKenzie, Executive Director

Mr Tim Smith, Director Operations

Ms Verena Mauldon (Minutes)

Site visit with Peter Lonergan and Hugo Chan, Cracknell & Lonergan Architects Pty Ltd (met on site for a 3:30pm start)

The Council met on site with the authors of the independent report commissioned by the Heritage Council to consider the level of architectural significance of the Wran Building; the modifications made to the Ultimo Tramways Power House; and the social significance of the building. The significance of the collection versus the significance of the building housing the collection was also discussed. The authors discussed issues and answered questions regarding the report during the site visit.

After an inspection of parts of the main museum buildings at 4:30pm Peter Lonergan and Hugo Chan left the meeting.

The Heritage Council also considered a confidential (partial) draft report received the previous day, which provided extensive additional historic and contextual information.

A report from Heritage NSW was considered which recommended that the site not be listed.

Heritage Council Meeting

Declaration of Interest

Chair, Frank Howarth opened the formal special meeting and requested a declaration of conflict of interest in respect of the agenda item Ultimo Tramways Power House Nomination. All members declared they had no conflict of interest in relation to this project.

Discussion

The Chair noted the paper presented on the Notice of Intention to Consider Listing. HNSW summarised the State Heritage Register (SHR) legislative process and the need for an item to meet 'one or more' criterion for consideration, or if against one criterion, it must be of 'particular significance' to meet a state threshold.

The Chair summarised the reports received to date, the findings of the commissioned Cracknell & Lonergan report and the revised HNSW assessment report and recommendations not to list as tabled. The previous recommendations of the SHRC in 2016 and 2019 were noted.

The Members discussed the 1988 Wran building addition and museum activation of the site since 1988 and the social significance of the place and associated museum use and history of the MAAS collection as it has moved over time.

The discussion covered:

- General agreement that the site's historical importance to the development of Sydney, its electrification, and specifically the tramways was likely to be of a State level value. The rarity of the site in the context of existing powerhouse listings was briefly canvassed.
- The dilapidated condition of original Power House buildings when adapted as a museum and perceived negative impacts associated with the 1988 rapid Bicentennial development program
- That the requested "documentation of the history of postmodernism as an architectural trend" to provide a context for assessing the museum relative to buildings across NSW was not strongly covered in the Lonergan report;
- Views that the Wran Building and the 1988 adaptive reuse of the historic buildings did not adequately fulfil its core function as a museum/exhibition space across its lifespan
- The opinion reflected in Lonergan report that the Wran Building was not a leading example of the postmodern architectural genre, nor that the architectural awards for the Powerhouse adaptation were measures of heritage significance.
- The complexity of assessing social significance and defining attachment at a State threshold level, and relevance of petitions and other public commentary
- That Council did not have the benefit of the opinion of a professional historian to provide documentary analysis and context
- The desirability of having a better understanding of the technical/ engineering significance of the site
- The opportunities for creative adaptation of this landmark site as an important heritage component within a potentially lively new precinct (like nearby Central Park)

After the views of Members were canvassed, the Chair called for an indication of views as a straw poll on the Nomination from the National Trust and the recommendation of the revised HNSW report before it.

- A majority concurred that the information did NOT establish the likely significance to list the site for social significance at a state level.
- A majority concurred that the information DID establish the likely state significance of the core historic Ultimo Tramways Building (not including the Wran or Harwood Buildings) for historical and aesthetic significance values at a state level.

There was a recognition that the postmodern era is not well represented on the SHR and further work needs to be done to proactively establish which buildings/sites in NSW may be of state heritage value as they are increasingly rare.

Resolution 2020-10

The Heritage Council of NSW resolved that:

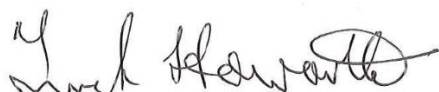
1. The item known as “Ultimo Tramways Power House” at Harris St Ultimo, defined in accordance with the curtilage shown at Annexure A of the Minutes (excluding the Wran Building and the Harwood Building), may be of state heritage significance;
2. In accordance with section 33(1)(a) of the *Heritage Act 1977*, will give each person that it considers to be an affected owner or occupier written notice that it is going to consider whether or not to recommend the listing of the item concerned (a *Notice of Intention to Consider Listing*); and
3. In accordance with section 33(1)(b) and section 33(1)(c) of the *Heritage Act 1977*, within 14 days after notice of intention to consider listing is given, will cause a notice of intention to consider listing to be published in a newspaper circulating in the area in which the item is situated, inviting submissions on the listing, specifying a date as the closing date for the receipt of submissions of 28 days after the publication of the newspaper notice and the manner in which submissions may be made.

Moved by Dr Nicholas Brunton and seconded by Mr Ian Clarke.

21 April 2020 Amendment

Concerns were raised by Ms Colleen Morris, Ms Sheridan Burke and Ms Louise Thurgood, about the methodology and the conclusion of the Lonergan Report, in particular regarding historic and social significance.

Meeting closed: 5:30 pm



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Mr Frank Howarth PSM

Chair, Heritage Council of NSW

Date: 21 April 2020