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HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

HHA WILLOW GROVE STATEMENT 24 Dec 2019

Hidden within the Business Plan to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta the State Government proposed to demolish heritage buildings, Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace. Sadly, this veiled threat to much loved heritage is now being realised, despite pre and post state election reassurances, with the news that Premier Gladys Berejiklian has reversed her decision to preserve Willow Grove.

Bulldozers are soon expected to obliterate the heritage listed Willow Grove. Multiple sources and leaked government documents show Ms Berejiklian has opted to demolish the 1870s built Italianate villa at Phillip St Parramatta as people enter their Christmas breaks in the hope of avoiding scrutiny. This is a disgrace.

In unison with the National Trust of Australia, The Royal Australian Historical Society, the North Parramatta Residents Action Group and the Parramatta and wider community, the Historic Houses Association of Australia opposes the destruction of these significant Parramatta heritage sites and insists on their restoration and integration in any future developments.

A Parramatta Council spokesman stated it had previously written to the state government requesting the heritage significance of Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace was considered in the Powerhouse Museum's development process. "Willowgrove and St George's terrace are important local heritage sites and our community feels strongly about protecting them," the spokesman said.

Willow Grove, built in the 1870s, is a fine example of a Victorian Italianate two-storey villa. Its notable Palisade Fence, elaborately carved sandstone gate posts, mature trees and garden are an oasis in the Parramatta CBD. It contributed much social history in the early to mid twentieth century as a private Maternity Hospital.

St Georges Terrace, built from 1881, is a complete row of seven terrace houses also recognised as significant for historical and aesthetic reasons as a representative example of modest Victorian period terraces constructed during an early wave of development in the area. Both properties contribute to the Phillip St streetscape and the historic character of the Parramatta townscape.

Parramatta is Australia's second oldest settlement and it is essential that its remaining colonial and nineteenth century architecture is preserved. The NSW state Government as custodian must ensure that this representative and irreplaceable heritage is secured for present and future generations. The people of Parramatta and Western Sydney take great pride in the history & heritage of this region and expect government to showcase all that it offers.

It is a major concern for the people of Parramatta that their heritage is being disrespected. Demolishing Willow Grove would mean that Parramatta and the nation have lost yet another link to their important historical past. Like the National Trust, the Historic Houses Association does not understand how a building considered worthy of a heritage listing, using accepted criteria for listing, can now simply be disregarded because a new use is considered more appropriate.

Tim Duddy, Chair, Historic Houses Association of Australia

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