

Premier to power up two museums

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GLADYS Berejiklian has backflipped on an election promise to move the Powerhouse Museum from the CBD to Western Sydney, instead bowing to inner-city pressure to fund two museums.

The government will keep the Powerhouse's Ultimo site in the city open, but is insisting it will still continue with an outpost plan in Parramatta.

The government had budgeted to save \$195 million from its plan to sell Ultimo, but has faced unrelenting pressure from activist groups to leave the museum in place.

The backflip comes after the state government has relentlessly tried to build the case for abandoning the Ultimo location.

For several years it has pointed to a report that it would cost \$500 million to bring the site up to scratch and has privately cited woeful visitor data.

The government was not able to provide the cost impact of today's announcement.

In 2018, it said the Powerhouse Parramatta plan — which includes a new state-of-the-art building on flood-risked land — would cost \$645 million, but other estimates have placed this cost higher.

Today's announcement comes less than a month after Ms Berejiklian dumped her promise to upgrade ANZ Stadium — at the time pledging to stick with the plan to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta.

Ms Berejiklian said her new decision — which was hastily revealed to the media late yesterday afternoon — would ensure Sydney had two world-class facilities.

"Sydney is a global city of

more than five million people and this will allow us to provide an outstanding visitor experience in the areas of technology, science, engineering and design at two major locations," Ms Berejiklian said.

"It will mean far more people have access to many more of the amazing exhibits held by the Powerhouse and, importantly, help us create vibrant centres to inspire learning in the fields of sciences and applied arts for the next generation."

The new museum at Parramatta will create more than 1100 construction jobs, up to 2400 indirect jobs, and hundreds more once opened, the government said.

In a statement, the government said it would explore if some of the funds earmarked for relocation costs could be used on renovations.

The Premier insisted that the government would not waver in its commitment to deliver a world-class facility at Parramatta.

"The new museum at Parramatta will give us the opportunity to create something special that benefits millions of people for years to come," Ms Berejiklian said.

"At the same time Ultimo will evolve and grow alongside the newly announced Tech Central, the revamped Sydney Fish Market and rejuvenated Darling Harbour precincts."

The decision was made after the government this week faced threats from the CFMEU, who pledged to put a ban on the demolition of key historical sites in Parramatta including Willow Grove and St George's Terrace.

However, a spokesman last night could not say what the latest changes would mean for these buildings.