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Sydney Morning Herald

'Utter lunacy': Plan to shift Willow Grove for Parramatta Powerhouse sparks outcry

By [Megan Gorrey](#)

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The construction union will not back down from a boycott on demolition work that could damage a heritage building the Berejiklian government wants to relocate to make way for the Powerhouse in Parramatta.

Arts Minister Don Harwin said on Thursday the 1886 Italianate villa known as Willow Grove would be dismantled and shifted to North Parramatta, while a row of seven terraces known as St George's Terrace would be preserved.

[CFMEU NSW secretary Darren Greenfield placed a "green ban" blocking demolition works on Parramatta's historic Willow Grove and St George's Terrace buildings in June. *CREDIT: LOUISE KENNERLEY*]

The Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) placed a "green ban" on the two properties in response to calls from the public to have them preserved and incorporated into the museum's design. The decision to shift the building removes a significant obstacle in the government's \$840 million plan for the Powerhouse in Parramatta - months after backing down from plans to remove the institution from Ultimo.

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But CFMEU NSW secretary Darren Greenfield said the green ban remained in place and the union was "asking all our contractors and builders to not touch this building".

"The plan to move Willow Grove is nonsensical and will result in the loss of the building's heritage value. Willow Grove is over 150 years old, made of 150-year-old bricks and 150-year-old timbers.

"The dismantling of the building will inevitably result in the destruction of much, if not all, of the original materials. What will be rebuilt on a completely different location will not be Willow Grove - it will be a copy."

Mr Harwin said the plan to relocate Willow Grove was in response to community feedback. It has been supported by Parramatta Liberal MP Geoff Lee and the lord mayor of City of Parramatta, Bob Dwyer, who said it was "an opportunity to breathe new life into this historic building".

Labor leader Jodi McKay said the plan was "ludicrous" and the government should reveal its cost. "[Parramatta MP] Geoff Lee says that it's a great middle ground, I mean this is just a crazy, crazy proposal and I don't know where it's come from. It's just ridiculous," Ms McKay told 2GB radio on Friday.

[The state government is refining the design of the Powerhouse Museum earmarked for the banks of the Parramatta River]

North Parramatta Residents Action Group spokeswoman Suzette Mead said demolishing the property and "rebuilding some faux replica beside the sandstone, convict-built Parramatta Gaol" was "utter lunacy". "The streetscape of Parramatta will lose its last-remaining connection with its past - erased by a museum."

The decision comes in the midst of an Upper House inquiry into the Powerhouse and a last-minute push from a new coalition of western Sydney business, arts, education and health groups for Willow Grove to be relocated.

The demolition of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace was assumed as part of business cases prepared for the Parramatta Powerhouse. But the government later said it would try to keep those buildings. According to a response to submissions, prepared by Infrastructure NSW and released this week, part of the museum's setback would be widened to retain St George's Terrace as part of the Phillip Street frontage.

[Willow Grove will be moved to make way for the new Powerhouse museum. *CREDIT:NICK MOIR*]

The documents said Willow Grove would be relocated "off-site within the Parramatta area", with further work required to "determine the future site as well as the reconstruction process and the program to be undertaken".

The state government revealed a host of changes to the design of the museum, including revisions to the undercroft, which lifts the museum and its collection above the site's one-in-100-year flood level. The redesign includes screens that will block the public from accessing the area, except during special events managed by the Powerhouse, in response to concerns it would be a death trap during downpours and floods.