

The Sydney Morning Herald

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Saving Willow Grove: The plan to shift historic building to North Parramatta

By [Megan Gorrey](#)

October 8, 2020 — 5.10pm

A historic Italianate villa that was earmarked for demolition to make way for the new Powerhouse museum in western Sydney will be shifted to North Parramatta, following a lengthy community battle to preserve it on-site.

Arts Minister Don Harwin said the 19th century Willow Grove, which sits on the Parramatta site of the museum, would be dismantled and re-erected nearby in response to feedback from residents during the planning process.

[Shooters, Fishers and Farmers MP Robert Borsak, Darren Greenfield CFMEU NSW Construction Secretary, David Shoebridge and Labor's Walt Secord at the gates of Willow Grove. *CREDIT: STEVEN SIEWERT*]

Mr Harwin said late on Thursday that the original heritage portion of nearby St George's Terrace, including its brick facade, would be retained and refurbished.

The Berejiklian government is pressing ahead with its \$840 million ambition to build a second Powerhouse on the banks of the Parramatta River, months after backing down from plans to shift the institution from Ultimo.

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[The Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union \(CFMMEU\) had placed a green ban on Willow Grove and the terraces in response to calls to have them preserved and incorporated into the museum's design - a move that threatened to stall the project.](#)

It previously rejected Infrastructure NSW's idea to relocate the villa, arguing the union would not support any proposal that did not preserve the property in its entirety in its existing location.

Mr Harwin said on Thursday the decision was the best outcome for western Sydney residents and the NSW arts industry. "With this decision we will deliver vastly improved access to Willow Grove on a better site and western Sydney gets its long awaited and much deserved first cultural institution," he said.

Parramatta Labor councillor Donna Davis said the announcement was premature given the environmental impact statement process for the project had not yet been completed. "Surely any removal of a local heritage item, either by demolition or relocation, still requires you to follow proper planning processes," she said. "Willow Grove's heritage significance is its connection to its place as a 19th century Italianate villa in the Parramatta CBD, not North Parramatta."

The buildings' fate came under the spotlight during a NSW parliamentary inquiry on Thursday. Western Sydney Business Chamber executive director David Borger, who is on the museum's board of trustees, said Willow Grove sat at the centre of the museum site and keeping it would require significant design changes.

Mr Harwin's announcement did not specify to where in North Parramatta the building would be moved. The Cumberland Hospital site north of Parramatta River, which includes the historic Female Factory buildings, has long been eyed as a possible arts and cultural hub for western Sydney, similar to Redfern's Carriageworks.

Powerhouse museum chief executive Lisa Havilah told the inquiry what happened to Willow Grove's was "a matter for Infrastructure NSW".

Labor MP Rose Jackson questioned whether the retention of the Ultimo building, which houses many large objects including the Locomotive No.1, meant the size of the new Parramatta museum could be scaled back. Ms Havilah said the Powerhouse had half a million objects in its collection and about 10 per cent of those items had been displayed at the Ultimo site during the past 30 years.

"We have hundreds of other very large objects including planes, trains, buses, a range of incredible objects that need large spaces and are required for us to really tell the great stories of ingenuity and innovation.

"This is a real opportunity to really showcase our collection in an incredible new museum, in a whole range of different ways, but that does include large objects."

Ms Havilah told the inquiry that Create NSW and Infrastructure NSW were developing a response to public submissions on the project. A business case is being prepared to present to the government later this year.