

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/parramatta-powerhouse-approval-drives-renewed-backlash-threats-20210214-p572ad.html>

Sydney Morning Herald

Parramatta Powerhouse approval drives renewed backlash, threats

By [Linda Morris](#)

February 14, 2021 — 3.30pm

(in print 15 February)

The Berejiklian government has been warned against a “dead of night” demolition of the historic villa that is to make way for the new Parramatta Powerhouse.

The NSW branch of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) vowed to bring in affiliated workers from nearby construction sites in Parramatta to enforce a green ban to protect the 19th-century riverside mansion known as Willow Grove.

[Destined for dismantling and relocation. *CREDIT:JACKY GHOSSEIN*]

Final planning approval was announced on Friday, green lighting the \$840 million project with Parramatta City Council lord mayor and the Powerhouse’s board of trustees welcoming the decision as a once in a lifetime opportunity for western Sydney.

The Department of Planning concluded that retaining Willow Grove would “severely compromise” the development of the site and delivery of public benefits. It recommended careful selection of an “appropriate setting” that would allow the building to be dismantled, shifted, and reused in a way that increased public access.

All works would be supervised by a qualified heritage specialist subject to the preparation of a heritage interpretation plan, statement of heritage impact and conservation management plan.

The seven historic terraces known as St George’s Terrace are to be retained as part of the museum’s Phillip Street frontage, subject to a new report that will consider its fit-out and future use.

Red hearts were hung on the security fence of Willow Grove for Valentine’s Day on Sunday to express support for keeping the heritage building onsite, referencing its commanding river views.

While the existing design was striking and the museum needed, Sydney architect Shaun Carter said a superior and cheaper outcome, even at this stage of the planning process, would be for the architects to redesign the museum around the existing building while incorporating the site’s Indigenous history going back 60,000 years.

Adapted, the former maternity hospital could tell its stories in its historical context, he said. “Maybe it will take \$1 million for the architects and the design team to include Willow Grove in the museum design. But it will take \$20 million to relocate Willow Grove, you will have to bring it up to code because it wouldn’t comply with contemporary codes. Its heritage would be significantly and fundamentally diminished from the get-go.”

‘In some strange unworldly logic this government seeks to knock down heritage to build a museum to house stories of Parramatta’s proud past.’

North Parramatta Residents Action Group

National Trust’s David Burdon said there was no question that the new museum would be a wonderful addition to Parramatta’s extraordinary cultural and historic legacy.

Willow Grove was a cement rendered brick building that could not be moved without almost total loss of the original fabric, he said.

“We are going to be left a monument to a forward planning proposal, Mr Burdon said. “This project has taken heritage tokenism to a new level because the revised design does not respond to St Georges Terrace and we would argue it is a detrimental outcome for both buildings on the site.”

Mr Burdon said he was sceptical of the entire heritage process. “Heritage assessment of St Georges Terrace asked if the additions would visually dominate the heritage items and the consultant’s response was, ‘not applicable’, “The new development is not an addition to the heritage item.”

North Parramatta Residents Action Group sought government assurances that Willow Grove would not be flattened by a “bulldozer in the dead of night”. The *Herald* has contacted Planning Minister Rob Stokes for comment.

“In some strange unworldly logic this government seeks to knock down heritage to build a museum to house stories of Parramatta’s proud past,” the group said in a statement.

Powerhouse chief executive Lisa Havilah said the internationally significant museum would connect young people and communities with its collections to tell stories of ingenuity and innovation and reflect the diversity of western Sydney.

“Powerhouse Parramatta will deliver dynamic exhibition, education and community programs that will bring cultural and scientific leaders from around the world and across Australia into Parramatta.

“In an Australian-first the Powerhouse will provide opportunities for 10,000 regional NSW students each year to stay at the Museum and immerse themselves in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) programs.”