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Legal action launched to stop work on Parramatta Powerhouse

By [Linda Morris](#)

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Residents have launched legal action to halt work on the \$915 million Parramatta Powerhouse, just weeks after the Berejiklian government gave the museum project the green light.

A residents action group has sought an injunction to halt any works taking place on the historic 140-year-old Victorian Italianate Villa, [Willow Grove](#), that stands in the way of the proposed museum pending a full hearing of claims before the Land and Environment Court.

[Willow Grove, built in the 1870s, is set to be demolished and rebuilt elsewhere to make way for the Parramatta Powerhouse. *JANIE BARRET*]

While planning may still proceed, legal action could delay a start to the museum's construction. The state government is expected to vigorously defend the integrity of the planning process.

The North Parramatta Residents Action Group is challenging planning approval on the basis that the environmental assessment did not meet requirements for a state significant project. Summons for a judicial review was filed on Thursday.

“We have been left with no option other than to commence this action,” its spokesperson Suzette Meade said. “The Powerhouse development can be redesigned but Willow Grove's heritage significance is inseparable from its location.”

The claim states that the environmental assessment failed to assess any feasible alternatives to development including other sites.

[An artist's impression of the Parramatta Powerhouse. *MUSEUM OF APPLIED ARTS AND SCIENCES*]

Further, the environment assessments did not demonstrate, as required, attempts to avoid or mitigate the impact of heritage significance or cultural heritage values of the site and surrounding heritage items.

The Land and Environment Court has been asked to rule that consent by the Minister of Planning or their delegate is invalid.

Under 188 conditions of approval, Planning Minister Rob Stokes required Willow Grove be relocated to an alternative site. A row of terraces, known as St George's Terrace, is to be integrated into the museum's streetscape.

In 2017, a redevelopment of Walsh Bay was delayed two years after the government was forced to go back to the drawing board when the Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the owner of a nearby restaurant. The owner had challenged the project because it failed to consider the impact on surrounding businesses. [Large parts of the planning process for Walsh Bay had to be redone as a result.](#) The Willow Grove application argues that the impact on the surrounding heritage conservation area needed to have been considered as part of the assessment process for a designated state significant development.

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Major institutions including Western Sydney University, the Committee for Sydney and the Parramatta Eels have backed the establishment of the new science and technology museum, the first major cultural institution to be located in the region.

The Maritime Union of Australia has joined the National Trust in supporting a green ban imposed by the NSW branch of the CFMEU on any demolition of Willow Grove claiming that its historic significance warrants protection in situ.

Representing residents is Tim Hale, SC; the nephew of the late Ken Hale, who brought proceedings about the divestment of lands from Parramatta Park for the Parramatta Stadium in the 1980s.

Powerhouse chairman Peter Collins said this week that the once-in-a-decade flooding of the Parramatta River last weekend would not have come within four metres of the museum entrance and proved the museum was positioned well above even the rarest of flood events.

In a statement, Powerhouse chief executive Lisa Havilah and Collins said the community response had been overwhelmingly positive and they were looking forward to the institution opening its doors.

A spokesperson for Minister for Planning Rob Stokes said the government would not comment as the matter was now before the courts.