

# Willow Grove could end up in storage for years after deconstruction



By [Linda Morris](#)

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Plans are underway to deconstruct historic villa Willow Grove and pack preserved parts on timber pallets inside waterproof containers for indefinite storage, while the search for a new site begins.

A consultant's report for Infrastructure NSW outlines the process for dismantling the villa, the sole surviving example of a riverside mansion in the Parramatta CBD, and demolishing its rear extensions.

But the [Advisian report](#), dated June 8, says wide consultation on a shortlist of new sites would begin within six months of construction beginning on the Parramatta Powerhouse. Subject to structural engineering, heritage reports and development approvals, it raises the prospect that the dismantled pieces will be lying in storage for at least a year, if not longer.



Willow Grove as it once was. JANIE BARRETT

“Every year (if relevant), the storage site will be accessed by authorised persons and a condition report and stocktake undertaken to ensure no fabric is missing or has begun to deteriorate,” the report by Advisian states.

Parramatta Councillor Donna Davis said the situation is “as bad as predicted”.

“Willow Grove will be put in a storage container and will never see the light of day again. This all points to a flawed, rushed process that gives me flashbacks to the Royal Oak demolition debacle,” she said, referring to [the iconic hotel](#) that made way for the Parramatta Light Rail.

“Our understanding is that those with ethics in the construction industry have run a mile from this ‘demolition and deconstruct’ job.

“If the government was serious about rebuilding Willow Grove and respectful of the concerns raised in the record 1500-plus project submissions they would have completed the consultation process prior to these works commencing.”

Doors, an ornate staircase, a fireplace, ceilings and windows are to be labelled, numbered, removed and stored on timber pallets to await a public consultation process that will begin with the construction of the Parramatta Powerhouse and is expected to extend to Christmas.

Brick walls will be numbered and collapsed and the chimneys removed above the roofline, either as a single piece depending on its condition, or dismantled, cleaned, stored and reused. Willow Grove’s original ceiling and floors are to be preserved. Where salvageable, the slate roof tiles will be cleaned and stored.

The raised sandstone garden beds will be recorded, removed and reused at the new site, which is to be large enough for the villa, its Phillip Street front fence, and landscaped surrounds.

The report said the surroundings of the new site should not detract from Willow Grove’s heritage significance, and that it’s desirable that the location had river views and be located near other buildings with similar historical uses.

Some original fabric of Willow Grove, it concedes, will not be reused, including brickwork mortar and render as well as non-salvageable timber and plaster. Casts are to be taken of plasterwork in case of damage, cornices replaced and an analysis carried out on the chemical composition of the mortar and plasterwork.

The National Trust of NSW’s director of conservation David Burdon said the methodology of deconstruction and relocation was “woefully inadequate”.

“Deconstruction is equivalent to demolition as far as the National Trust is concerned and it’s not an adequate document to show how that deconstruction is proposed. The methodology for deconstruction is not even two pages long. A consumer buying from Harvey Norman would get better protection.”

The heritage-listed ornate driveway gates of Willow Grove were sawn off on Monday, residents’ spokesperson Suzette Meade said. “We don’t trust them as far as we could kick them,” she said of the government.

To mitigate damage to Willow Grove, the report says “suitably qualified and experienced” construction workers would undertake the deconstruction, with the appointed contractor briefed on its heritage significance prior to the start of works.

The villa will be laser scanned to obtain three-dimensional digital surveys and datasets to aid reconstruction.

The report into the methods of deconstruction was commissioned per conditions of development [consent, which are currently being challenged by the North Parramatta Resident’s Action Group in the NSW Court of Appeal and will be heard July 2.](#)

Infrastructure NSW lost its battle in court Friday to overturn an injunction halting preliminary works on Willow Grove while the appeal was being heard.

Willow Grove is subject to a union green ban and the [first community picket was called Tuesday](#) when workmen were seen entering the building with tools and ladders. Opponents fear demolition will take place under the cover of a pandemic lockdown.