

<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/removal-of-historic-willow-grove-starts-to-make-way-for-parramatta-powerhouse-20210812-p58i61.html>

Sydney Morning Herald

'Green ban' defied as removal work begins on Willow Grove

Also as: Removal of historic Willow Grove starts to make way for Parramatta Powerhouse

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Linda Morris



Willow Grove is being removed to make way for the new Parramatta Powerhouse Museum building. Photo: Wolter Peeters

Work on the \$915 million Parramatta Powerhouse is set to begin with the construction contract to be signed within weeks of the historic home Willow Grove being brought down.

Contractor Haus Building Services Pty Ltd moved on site Wednesday to start removal of the Italianate villa, the last surviving example of a riverside mansion in the Parramatta CBD.

The Rozelle-based firm was awarded the \$1.9 million contract by "limited tender", meaning the company was directly approached. Bids for the construction contract are expected from the likes of building giants LendLease, John Holland, Richard Crookes Constructions and Multiplex.

The NSW Government has been accused of using the Delta outbreak to override the green ban preventing the removal of Willow Grove.

Work on the heritage site had been halted by a green ban imposed by NSW Branch of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime and Mining Union in June 2020. It has the backing of the Maritime Union of Australia, Nurses and Midwives Association, Teachers Federation, Unions NSW, Public Services Union, National Trust of Australia and Historic Houses Association.

COVID-related public health restrictions permit construction workers on building sites at 50 per cent capacity but bar public pickets and protests that might have enforced the green ban, a device used to protect The Rocks from redevelopment.

The Berejiklian government has pledged that Willow Grove will be rebuilt on a new site in the Parramatta local government area at a cost of \$10 million. But formal public consultation to develop a shortlist of sites cannot start while the COVID-19 outbreak is not under control.

"Currently with no public reports existing on how Willow Grove can even be relocated, or where or when it will ever see the light of day, it's completely outrageous that any works commence on this site at all," Suzette Meade, of the North Parramatta Residents' Action group said.

The wording of the site contract for Willow Grove has alarmed residents. It specifies the contractor "demolish the building" and transport and unload removed materials to a storage facility.

Labor's spokesman for Arts and Heritage Walt Secord said the Heritage Council of NSW testified at a parliamentary inquiry yesterday that it did not provide an assessment of the heritage value of Willow Grove.

"It is the old don't ask and don't tell' approach in regard to heritage policy," Mr Secord said.

"How can the Heritage Council of NSW not have an opinion on the heritage value when Willow Grove and the Powerhouse Museum were the second most debated arts issue, after COVID support to struggling artists?"

When asked about his view on the removal and relocation of Willow Grove at the parliamentary hearing into the Heritage Act yesterday, Heritage Council of NSW chair Frank Howarth said it was "not a matter for discussion by or consideration by the Heritage Council".

Infrastructure NSW confirmed work had resumed on the Powerhouse Parramatta site in line with the NSW Public Health Order, NSW Government COVID guidelines and the approved development application.

"While Willow Grove cannot be retained on site, we remain committed to relocating [it], to return it to the community and make it available for future generations," a spokesperson said. "All work ... will be done closely with the Heritage Specialist, to ensure [it] is dismantled in accordance with the approved *Relocation Framework and Methodology Plan*."