

# Sydney Morning Herald

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## ‘Architectural orphan’: Historic Willow Grove villa closer to relocation



By [Linda Morris](#)

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Three riverside sites have been shortlisted as the potential final resting home for the historic villa of Willow Grove, brought down to make way for the \$915 million Parramatta Powerhouse.

An address within a health precinct near the old Parramatta Gaol tops the shortlist of sites identified as suitable to relocate the Victorian Italianate villa, now lying in pieces in a storage facility in south-western Sydney following its dismantling in 2020.



Artist impression of the rebuilt Willow Grove.

The 1891-built home [came down last year](#) amid public protests when the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union [lifted a green ban](#) that had protected it from relocation. A separate heritage-listed row of terraces has been incorporated into the design of the Parramatta Powerhouse. Slate roofing was salvaged, along with windows and doors, timber framing and stairs, the front palisade fence and 90 per cent of the original bricks.

But in April, [the National Trust withdrew](#) from the Willow Grove Community Reference Group, after it concluded that the Victorian mansion could not be “authentically reconstructed”.

The shortlist, now up for community consultation, brings a decision on Willow Grove’s new address one step closer. Under the consent conditions of the development application for the Powerhouse Museum, a final location will need to be identified by December.

But the actual purpose for the reconstructed villa is still not settled, with expectations that a rebuilt Willow Grove will not open to the public before 2024.

Arts minister Ben Franklin said the government had been working closely with the City of Parramatta and community groups to identify the appropriate location and future use of Willow Grove. This consultation was continuing to ensure the heritage and cultural significance of this important asset is appropriately highlighted, and its future use is relevant to community needs.

Heritage advocates are, however, seeking clarification that Willow Grove will not be located within the boundaries of the Parramatta North Heritage Precinct, of which there may be some crossover with the Westmead Health Precinct.

It’s feared the location of the architectural orphan in these parts would undermine the heritage integrity and continuity of Parramatta Female Factory and other historical colonial buildings in their parkland settings. These are considered so significant as to be worthy of UNESCO World Heritage listing.

The two other possible sites are Lake Parramatta Reserve, on Crown land, and Robin Thomas Reserve within the Parramatta CBD, owned and managed by City of Parramatta Council.

At Lake Parramatta, Willow Grove would stand in a bushland setting with open lawns and high levels of public visitation. In Robin Thomas Reserve the mansion would be located adjoining Ellangowan House.

North Parramatta Residents Action Group (NPRAG) spokesperson Suzette Meade, who led public protests to save Willow Grove, said she believed the reference to Westmead Health Precinct, the first option, was misleading because the site which is being proposed is, in fact, located within the Parramatta North Heritage Precinct.

“That was the site that the NSW government pitched to CFMEU in 2020 for Willow Grove. That entire 26-hectare site is subject to a green ban announced by Jack Munday and CFMEU in 2015.”

NPRAG has been long opposed the location of Willow Grove in the Parramatta Park Trust lands, Wistaria Gardens, and the entire Cumberland Hospital East Precinct in North Parramatta.

Meade said other questions remained unanswered: “Who’s going to pay for the new site, who’s going to pay for its ongoing use? The problem is this government has no community buy-in because the people of Parramatta didn’t want Willow Grove gone. No one asked for it to be relocated.”

The City of Parramatta Council will forward a submission on the proposed locations to the NSW government. “We encourage the community to share their feedback on the project via Create NSW.”

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