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PARRAMATTA

Willow Grove heritage building to be destroyed for Powerhouse Museum

Joanne Vella, Parramatta Advertiser

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Bulldozers are soon expected to obliterate the state heritage-listed Willow Grove after Premier Gladys Berejiklian reversed her decision to preserve it for the construction of the \$767 million Powerhouse Museum.

The North Parramatta Residents' Action Group (NPRAG) has said multiple sources and leaked government documents show Ms Berejiklian has opted to demolish the 1870s-built Italianate villa at Phillip St.

St George's Terrace, on the corner of Wilde Ave and Phillip St, could also be demolished for the museum, which is expected to be completed by December 2022.



Willow Grove is on the chopping block. Picture: Angelo Velardo



St George's Terrace is likely to be destroyed too. Picture: Angelo Velardo



The museum, which could be known as the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, is coming to Parramatta.

NPRAG spokeswoman Suzette Meade said the decision came after the museum's final six architects had an option to retain the former maternity hospital but were planning to announce its demise soon.

"We've been told that this decision has already been made, no doubt to be dropped out as people enter their Christmas breaks in the hope of avoiding scrutiny," Ms Meade said.

"If this is true, it's a disgrace.

"Clearly, it's a big concern for the people of Parramatta that our heritage is being disrespected.

"Western Sydney heritage seems to be second rate and I think they should expect quite a kickback from the community."



North Parramatta Residents' Action Group members at Willow Grove last July protest against demolishing Willow Grove. Picture: Danny Aarons

The group has lobbied for the museum to be built in North Parramatta's Fleet St heritage precinct instead of the flood-prone riverbank site when then premier Mike Baird announced the museum for Parramatta in 2015.

A spokesman for Arts Minister Don Harwin said the government would not respond to any of the *Parramatta Advertiser's* questions.

Parramatta state Liberal MP Geoff Lee did not comment on heritage concerns but said he understood the winning design for the museum would be announced shortly.

"I look forward to seeing the final design," he said.

"Parramatta deserves world class arts and cultural institutions and that's what the NSW Government is delivering."



Heritage campaigners gather outside Willow Grove last year, calling for Parramatta MP Geoff Lee to help save the heritage-listed property. Picture: Danny Aarons

Last year, the *Parramatta Advertiser* reported that the government would save \$43 million by demolishing Willow Grove and St George's Terrace.

Willow Grove was used as a maternity hospital and the state-listed St George's Terrace is considered historically and aesthetically significant as an example of modest Victorian period terraces.

The group is calling on the premier to reverse her decision.

"If Willow Grove was in Willoughby there is no way this would be happening," Ms Meade said.

"This is an appalling start to what was promised as a move towards cultural funding equality; another bonus for developers."

National Trust of Australia's Parramatta branch president Cheryl Bates said demolishing Willow Grove would mean Parramatta lost another link to its important historical past.

"The National Trust does not understand how a building considered worthy of a heritage listing, using the accepted criteria for listing, can now simply be disregarded because a new use is considered more appropriate," she said.