

Marcus Jennejohn
Planner
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

By email: marcus.jennejohn@planning.nsw.gov.au

20 November 2020

Dear Mr Jennejohn,

Re: Moving of Willow Grove

As Conservation Director of the National Trust of Australia (NSW), and as a Registered Architect in NSW with experience in conservation work, I wish to express to you a position regarding the proposal to “move” the historic Willow Grove house at 34 Phillip Street, Parramatta.

I am sure that you will already be aware of the historic importance of this heritage-listed property. I simply wish to inform you of three key facts to consider in relation to the Willow Grove proposal:

1. The proposal is for demolition, not relocation

Logistically, Willow Grove cannot be simply picked up and moved wholesale, and the process of dismantling will destroy much of the original fabric. Some other old buildings may be made of solid sandstone blocks, or be of timber or steel construction that can be dismantled and re-erected. Willow Grove however is a cement rendered, brick house, with lath and plaster ceilings and fragile cornices. Any attempt to dismantle these materials results in catastrophic failure. Any “moved” building will of necessity be mostly new materials – the old bricks (should they not crumble) would have to be re-cemented and re-rendered, and the ceilings will all need to be new. No qualified architect or builder would re-install old roofing slates, or re-use any structurally unsound timber. The relocated building would thus be a new building, with perhaps some old verandahs and doors attached. This is not good practice.

2. Location, Location, Location

A good deal of the significance of Willow Grove derives from where it is and the associations it has. Moving it from its present site reduces this significance. The proposed relocation site also has its own, very important story as an institutional precinct that is a key part of Parramatta’s history. Building a reproduction house (without a connection to the river) would have a severe negative heritage impact on that place and its values.



3. It is a waste of money

The costs associated with such a proposal will be very considerable, and will bring little to no benefit to the heritage and people of Parramatta. The typology of the building (ie: a domestic two story house with relatively small rooms and the inability to have compliant access to the upper floor) also make it a troubled proposition in that it will be of little ongoing community use. Several such heritage buildings of course already exist in North Parramatta and have the same ongoing operational disadvantages.

The number of other beneficial heritage projects with a lasting impact for Parramatta that could be achieved with over \$10m of public money are considerable.

I would ask you to consider the legacy of a refurbished Roxy Theatre - capable of seating over 2000 people, supporting the creative industries, and acting as Parramatta's equivalent of the State Theatre - as opposed to building a reproduction Victorian-era house next to a gaol.

Parramatta's heritage should be living and breathing.

Yours Sincerely,

David Burdon
Conservation Director