

Powerhouse Parramatta

National Trust of Australia (NSW) Parramatta Regional Branch submission to the Ethos Urban and Infrastructure NSW Response to Submission (RS) from Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

OBJECTION to the treatment of heritage on the Powerhouse Parramatta site

This submission is to outline the Parramatta Branch's continuing concerns about the treatment of heritage on the Powerhouse Parramatta site and the disregard for written community feedback to the Powerhouse Parramatta EIS and webinar consultations undertaken by Ms Lisa Havilah and the Powerhouse Museum.

Heritage Issues identified in previous Branch submission

As stated in our previous submission, the Parramatta Branch adopt the approach that heritage items should not be seen as an inconvenience and heritage buildings provide an exceptional contrast and balance to modern concrete and glass structures and would afford a more hospitable environment for workers and visitors to Parramatta.

The majority of submissions received to the Powerhouse Parramatta EIS argued that Willow Grove is a treasured and highly significant heritage item to the community. Its physical location is part of the building's cultural significance and it needs to remain in its historical location where the building has significant associations and meaning for the community.

In stating their opposition initially to the destruction of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace as mooted in the EIS, respondents supported the continuing tenure of both of these buildings on Phillip Street Parramatta. The community love for these buildings and their retention as part of the Powerhouse Parramatta development is immense.

Willow Grove

The RS report states that the option chosen by Infrastructure NSW is their commitment to relocate and adaptively reuse Willow Grove off-site within the Parramatta area.

The relocation of the heritage listed Willow Grove from its original site in Phillip Street will remove the building's context and setting and is considered to be totally inappropriate. It is not desirable for a heritage item to be removed from its historical location where its physical and visual setting contribute to the building's cultural significance. This view is in line with The Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 2013) which is judged to provide a best practice standard for managing cultural heritage within Australia.

Further, recent comments made by Infrastructure NSW that it is possible to dismantle, relocate and rebuild Willow Grove without destroying its historical fabric are incorrect. Willow Grove is a cement rendered brick building with internal plasterwork and cannot be relocated without enormous damage to its fabric. To compare Willow Grove's relocation to the relocation of two other Parramatta buildings in the past is a false comparison. Both the previous relocated building were of sandstone construction and their physical reconstruction was successful, albeit with the loss of heritage significance, only because of their robust building materials. This will not be the case for Willow Grove and the resultant reconstruction will produce only a poor replica of this highly significant heritage building. To place a reconstructed Willow Grove in a foreign location unrelated to the site where its heritage significance was assessed, does not consider the buildings worth.

The RS states that community and special interest groups raised concern about the loss of these two heritage properties yet no sound reasons, nor detailed assessment, has been suggested that demonstrate that the buildings could not be retained or adapted for new uses. In response to these concerns the RS only states that the chosen site is the most suitable location although no other sites in the Parramatta area were considered as alternate sites.

Additionally, the Branch in their previous submission identified that the EIS did not consider alternate sites for Powerhouse Parramatta that would conserve the two heritage listed items – Willow Grove and St George's Terrace, contrary to the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARS) in accordance with Section 4.39 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. No response has been given in the RS to this process failure when the EIS was prepared, nor any mention of this issue addressed by Ethos Urban and Infrastructure NSW in the RS.

Similarly, the adaptive reuse of Willow Grove in its current location was given no consideration in either the EIS or Statement of Heritage Impact (SOHI). There continues to be nothing that suggests that Willow Grove is not suitable for adaptive reuse on the Phillip Street site. The demolition of Willow Grove is merely to achieve a pre-determined outcome but given the amount of café and retail activities proposed, Willow Grove is ideally placed to accommodate some of these uses.

This pre-determined outcome to demolish Willow Grove, and Infrastructure NSW's subsequent commitment to relocate the building, can only be seen as demolition and a further destruction of heritage items in the Parramatta area. The role of the heritage consultants to the EIS, Advisian was to provide heritage input into the EIS. Given their findings on the heritage significance of Willow Grove they were distracted by the pre-determined outcome that provides only for demolition.

St George's Terrace

The RS identifies the proposed retention of "St George's Terrace (and potential archaeological site) is supported on heritage grounds as the item's significant fabric and conservation values would be conserved within its context and setting" (page 15).

In reviewing the plans for the retention of St George's Terrace, the Branch has significant concerns about the treatment of this local heritage listed item. The form, scale and height Powerhouse Parramatta East wing will overpower and create adverse impacts to the heritage significance of St George's Terrace.

Consultation

Powerhouse Parramatta: Heritage Interpretation Strategy / September 2020 page 22 stated the following written feedback and ideas provided by community and stakeholders during the consultation process.

Colonial

- A desire for the retention of colonial heritage elements within the site including Willow Grove and St George's terraces;
- Desire for retention of landscape elements that exist within the site;
- Recognising the broader heritage of Parramatta, including its world heritage assets;
- Recognising desire to draw connection across these sites;
- Exploring convict and settler histories;
- Use of Parramatta River to establish the colony; and
- Farming/Old Government House.

In addition, Ms Havilah reported that 15 community webinars were conducted to seek feedback about the Powerhouse Parramatta proposal. The Parramatta Branch representatives and National Trust members participated in five of these webinars where grave concerns were expressed about the threat to heritage items located on the Powerhouse site.

Ms Havilah, in responding to questions asked at the Upper House Inquiry (8 October 2020) into the relocation of the Powerhouse stated that they had only received positive support for the Powerhouse development. When asked about any negative feedback received, and the status of Willow Grove, Ms Havilah hesitated, did not recall any negative feedback received about the development and took the question on notice.

Parramatta Branch representatives and National Trust members who attended five of the webinars reported that there was little or no positive feedback given at webinars. As reported, feedback received from participants was that there was overwhelming opposition to any proposal that resulted in the demolition of heritage on this site and that both

heritage items, Willow Grove and St George's Terrace, should be retained on the Phillip Street Parramatta site.

The Parramatta Branch is disgusted by the erroneous reporting and total disregard for community input into the EIS process that has in no way been acknowledged to inform the RS.

This RS and the previous EIS appear to be merely documents used to support a pre-determined outcome with no acknowledgment of the concerns expressed by heritage experts and the broader community. The assessment of the heritage significance of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace in the SOHI as part of the EIS spoke in glowing terms of the individual heritage significance of these two buildings. Given this, it is difficult to understand how it is then possible to conclude that one of these buildings should be demolished and the other totally compromised in its setting.