

Parramatta Powerhouse Response to Submissions

SSD – 10416

I object to the proposal to relocate Willow Grove to North Parramatta.

The Parramatta Powerhouse proposal attracted more public submissions than WestConnex, the Art Gallery of NSW – Sydney Modern or Metro West. The submissions were overwhelmingly objections calling for the protection of heritage including the retention of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace on Phillip Street.

The Infrastructure NSW (INSW) *Response to Submissions* now includes a proposal to retain St George's Terrace. However, the lack of respect for this heritage item, the failure to sympathetically incorporate these 1870s terraces into the new building, along with the lack of detail regarding its proposed adaptive reuse put into question the integrity of the proposal.

If INSW is serious about retaining St George's Terrace then the project should be altered to incorporate the heritage sympathetically and harmoniously into the design of the new building, whilst allowing for respectful setbacks and imaginative integration.

The revised Parramatta Powerhouse proposal does not achieve this in the slightest. In fact, the photomontage (Attachment C) suggests the idea to retain St George's Terrace to be nothing more than a mere afterthought. Unfortunately, this is the problem with this entire project. The response to heritage has been an afterthought rather than the primary focus of the site. Rather than drawing on heritage as an inspiration, it has been treated with total disregard and disdain. Any opportunity to sympathetically incorporate the past with the present has been overlooked and now, a proposal has been presented to save St George's Terrace but yet again, the lack of respect for heritage significance is the dominant feature.

Likewise, the proposal to remove Willow Grove is a missed opportunity.

The new building design has failed to blend in with its natural and built surrounds. Instead it dominates its surrounds and has become the primary focus. An institution of this calibre can still command attention without alienating its built and natural surrounds.

The *Response to Submissions* fails to address the key concern of 91% of submissions - to retain Willow Grove on the Museum site. Proposing to move Willow Grove is no different to demolishing it if the outcome results in the loss of the home from 34 Phillip Street.

The heritage significance of Willow Grove is the sum of all parts. This has never been just about the structure. This is about the setting, the garden forecourt, the streetscape. It is about Place.

The importance of retaining Willow Grove is about saving a place in the Parramatta CBD that is like no other and points to a place in time that is not seen in the same form anywhere else in the city. This is exactly why saving Willow Grove in this place is the key issue. It is not just about the building.

This is also why the proposal to retain St George's Terrace without Willow Grove is so flawed. Each place contributes to the heritage significance of the other. Together they are key elements in the streetscape of Phillip Street. Remove one and the other becomes isolated and its context is minimised.

Secondly, the *Response to Submissions* proposal to relocate Willow Grove is counter intuitive.

Doesn't INSW appreciate that the very fact they are proposing to move Willow Grove is an acknowledgment of its significance? If Willow Grove is significant enough to be relocated, it is significant enough to be retained at 34 Phillip St where it has context and relationship to that place.

Further, INSW has failed to provide any detailed information about how it proposes to move Willow Grove. There has been no expert heritage assessment and no expert advice provided to confirm that the idea is even plausible.

If the intention is to move the home to the Cumberland Heritage precinct, it is critical that a heritage assessment addresses the fact that all the buildings within this precinct are related to state institutionalisation of one type or another. Willow Grove has no relationship to this place.

In addition, INSW has not released any detailed financial costings for the proposed removal, rebuild and ongoing management and maintenance of Willow Grove on another site.

As part of my reply, I believe it is important to share the recommendations of the *City of Parramatta Heritage Advisory Committee*. The Committee was asked to review the *Response to Submissions* and provide advice. This was tabled in Item 17.2 – Attachment 2, *Business Paper of Ordinary Council Meeting*, 30 November 2020. Members of the Committee are Professor Carol Liston (Chair), Jeffrey Allen (Deputy), Dr Scott Hill, David Hoffman, Stephanie Liccardo, Gary Carter, Ruth Evans and Christine Rigby.

The recommendation was as follows: -

“That the Committee re-affirm its original resolution of 19 August 2020 formally opposing the deconstruction and reconstruction of Willow Grove at another site in accordance with the Burra Charter.

That the Committee oppose the re-location of Willow Grove to North Parramatta.

That the Committee note that the proposed re-location of Willow Grove does not align with or support the heritage significance of this home or align with the name given to this building, which was originally given in the context of its current riverside location.

That in the event that there are no clear directions given in regard to the extent of the St George's Terrace building to be retained, the Committee, as a minimum, supports the retention of the original form and fabric of the building."

I urge those conducting this assessment to come to Parramatta and stand in Horwood Place beside the Roxy Theatre. Look north to Willow Grove. As you walk down the street toward the house you will see why saving Willow Grove in its current place is so important to our city now and for future generations.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Donna Davis