

Resolution of Council

25 November 2024

Item 16.3

City of Sydney to Establish Guiding Principles for the Potential Public Land Divestment of Victoria Barracks

Moved by Councillor Maxwell, seconded by Councillor Ellsmore –

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) the Victoria Barracks was built in 1841. It was the third barracks built in Sydney and housed British soldiers until 1870 when it was occupied by colonial forces and the Australian army. It included accommodation, a hospital and prison;
- (ii) the site is on the State Heritage Register, the Commonwealth Heritage List and is locally heritage listed;
- (iii) the Victoria Barracks precinct is seen as the finest complex of colonial barracks (pre-1850) in Australia and is still currently in military use;
- (iv) it contains one of the most important groups of Edwardian military buildings in Australia and is a good and intact example of nineteenth century military barracks;
- (v) the site is the only substantial military barracks complex built in Australia in the early Victorian period;
- (vi) the precinct is also seen as a valuable site for future archaeological investigation of past methods of construction and ways of life;

- (vii) **Audit of ADF Land:** The 2024 National Defence Strategy (NDS) recommended an audit of Australian Defence Force (ADF) land holdings, including the Victoria Barracks site in Sydney. The audit report was submitted to federal ministers in December 2023 but has not been made public. The auditors, Jan Mason, former Managing Director of Defence Housing Australia, and Jim Miller, Chair of Infrastructure Victoria, were tasked with assessing whether Defence's high-density urban property holdings align with the military's current requirements;
- (viii) **Plans for Victoria Barracks:** During a Senate estimate in February 2024, Celia Perkins, Deputy Secretary for ADF's Security and Estate Group, stated that the ADF regularly reviews and manages its land holdings, balancing investments to support ADF capabilities;
- (ix) **Current Use:** The Victoria Barracks is home to Forces Command (FORCOMD), which oversees 85% of Army personnel, and the Australian Army Band Sydney;
- (x) **Heritage and Redevelopment Potential:** The barracks, including its green space, is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage Register. About 30% to 50% of the site is heritage-protected, but the remaining area could potentially be redeveloped if the site is divested;
- (xi) **Land Area and Housing Potential:** The site covers 0.15km². Given the density of surrounding Paddington, it's a site that could potentially accommodate the growing demand for new housing and could provide housing solutions for City of Sydney residents in the future;
- (xii) **Location and Accessibility:** The site is strategically located on Oxford Street near Moore Park, which currently has limited public access. Redevelopment could improve community access to green space and bike paths and would have public benefit in a variety of domains;
- (xiii) **Potential Public Benefit:** If the Victoria Barracks site is divested, it could provide significant public benefits, including housing and enhanced community amenities for the diverse residents of the City of Sydney; and
- (xiv) it is in the City's interests to be prepared for the possibility that this land could be available for alternate uses and should be proactive in its approach to this should the opportunity arise in the future;

(B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

- (i) ask City of Sydney staff to establish a set of guiding principles for the potential use of the Victoria Barracks site should the land be up for divestment. These principles will provide the Council with a framework should divestment come up in future;
- (ii) recommend that these principles should consider the high heritage value of the site and should also be open to meeting the needs of the community. This should include prioritising considerations of public greenspace, cultural uses and affordable housing, as well as ensuring there is meaningful community engagement in decision making processes; and

- (iii) prepare initial guidelines for community consultation on potential land use of the site for maximum public benefit. These and the guiding principles could be used in future for a study or masterplan commissioned by the City of Sydney staff in relation to the use of the Victoria Barracks site; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Minister for Defence Richard Marles to request a briefing for the City of Sydney Council on future plans for Victoria Barracks in Paddington and other ADF owned land in our Local Government Area, and a commitment to consult with the City of Sydney and the local community about future plans for the site.

Carried unanimously.

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