

Attachment A

Victoria Barracks Guiding Principles



November 2025

Victoria Barracks Guiding Principles

We acknowledge the Gadigal of the Eora Nation
as the Traditional Custodians of our local area.

CITY OF SYDNEY 

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Figure 1
(cover) Soldiers Quarters building with cannon gun.
Source: City of Sydney Archives
(opposite) Close up of Victoria Barracks perimeter wall.
Source: City of Sydney.

Introduction

About Victoria Barracks

Victoria Barracks is one of Sydney's most significant heritage sites, a symbol of 175 years of military service and an integral part of Australia's defence history. Built between 1841 and 1848,¹ this 15-hectare precinct is still owned and operated by the Australian Defence Force. It contains the finest complex of colonial barracks in Australia, with an important collection of late Georgian sandstone buildings that served military purposes for almost 2 centuries.²

Situated on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, Victoria Barracks occupies the ridgeline of Paddington. Originally selected for its strategic vantage points over Botany Bay and Port Jackson,³ the location is now surrounded by a vibrant and historically rich community.

The precinct embodies many layers of significance for Sydney and the nation. As the only surviving military barracks complex built in Australia during the early Victorian period,⁴ it provides a physical link to our colonial past and the evolution of Australia's defence forces. Victoria Barracks illustrates the nation's journey from British imperial troops to colonial forces, and ultimately to the modern Australian Army, reflecting the nation's journey to independence and self-determination.

Today, Victoria Barracks continues its military function as one of the bases for the Australian Army and home to its Sydney band. The perimeter walls, once built for defence, act as a barrier between this significant heritage site and the surrounding neighbourhood. With limited public access, the precinct remains largely unknown.

Figure 2
(top) Soldiers Quarters building with cannon gun. Source: City of Sydney Archives. (middle) NSW Artillery soldiers. Source: State Library NSW. (bottom) Helicopter landing at Victoria Barracks. Source: Defence Connect/CPL Dustin Anderson.

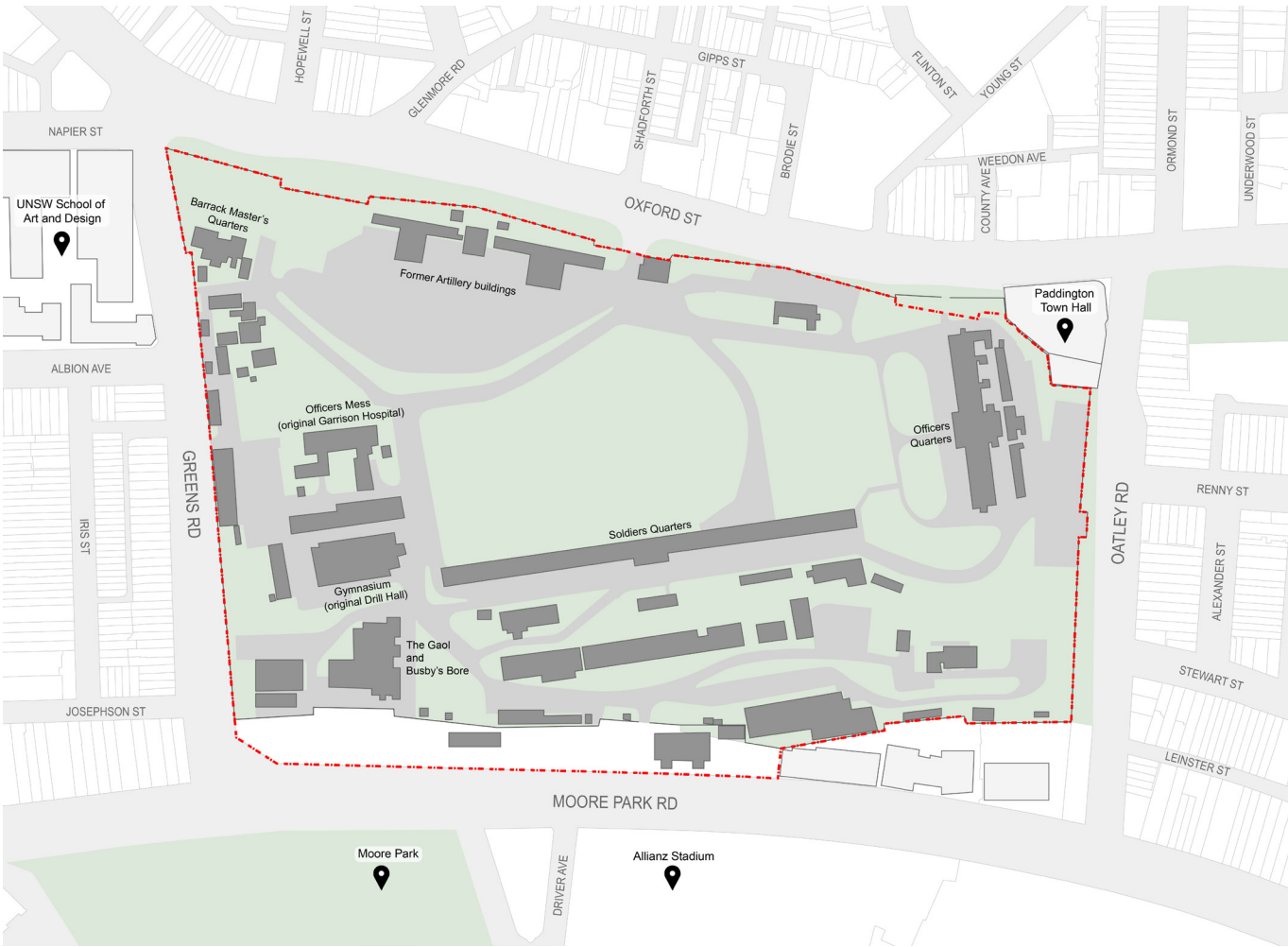
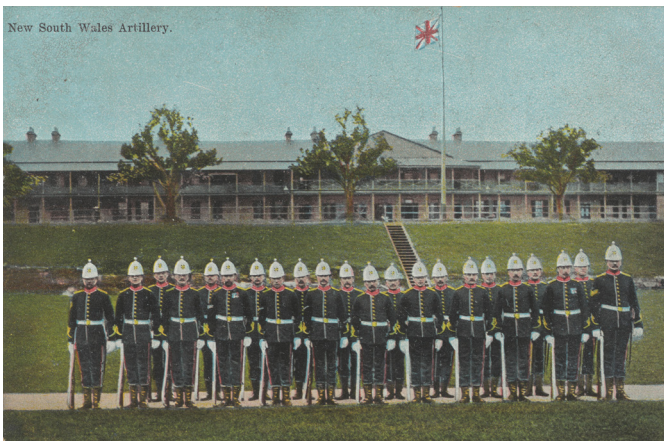


Figure 3. Map of Victoria Barracks showing key points of interest. Source: City of Sydney.

What the City is doing

The potential for Victoria Barracks to benefit the broader community while preserving its heritage significance has prompted the City of Sydney to plan for possible future scenarios. In 2023, a federal government audit of Australian Defence Force land considered whether these sites continue to meet contemporary military requirements. While no decision has been made about the future of Victoria Barracks, the City of Sydney recognises the importance of being prepared should this significant site become available for alternative uses.

This document presents guiding principles developed by talking with our communities. Any future plans for Victoria Barracks must consider community benefits while respecting and preserving its exceptional heritage values. These principles envision a future where the barracks could become a dynamic, accessible precinct serving Sydney's diverse communities through a thoughtful combination of heritage conservation, public open space, cultural facilities, diverse housing and community use.

The opportunity to reimagine Victoria Barracks is more than the potential to repurpose a military site. It offers the possibility of creating a new chapter in the precinct's long history – one that honours its past while addressing contemporary urban challenges including housing affordability, access to green space and community connection. By establishing these guiding principles now, the City of Sydney aims to ensure community voices are part of any future decision-making process and that the site's transformation, should it occur, provides lasting benefits for current and future generations.



Figure 4
Cricket at Victoria Barracks, 1981.
Source: National Archives

Background

In 2023, the federal government commissioned a comprehensive audit of Australian Defence Force land, including Victoria Barracks in Paddington. The audit assessed whether Defence's properties continue to align with its needs. It was submitted to federal ministers in December 2023 but its recommendations have not yet been made public.

The strategic review of defence assets is part of a broader reconsideration of how government-owned sites can be repurposed to meet the needs of Australia's rapidly growing cities. As urban populations expand and housing pressures intensify, questions about the best use of large, centrally located, government-owned sites have become increasingly relevant to planners and communities.

While no decision about the future of Victoria Barracks has been made, these guiding principles establish a framework to inform future planning.

Our approach reflects several key considerations:

- Recognising Victoria Barracks as a unique opportunity – rarely do sites of this scale, heritage significance and strategic location become available for community benefit.
- Understanding meaningful community conversations take time, and waiting until a decision is announced would limit opportunities to talk to residents, visitors and businesses.
- Establishing clear principles now provides certainty about community expectations and priorities.

The timing of this project also aligns with broader urban planning goals across Sydney, including housing supply and affordability, increasing density, tackling climate change and the need for more community facilities and green space. A site of this scale could make meaningful contributions to addressing these challenges.

There are precedents nationally and internationally for the successful transformation of military sites into community precincts. Properties such as Middle Head-Gubbuh Gubbuh in Mosman demonstrate how government-owned heritage sites can be successfully adapted for public benefit while preserving their historical significance.

Any future transformation of Victoria Barracks must address fundamental goals: conserving the site's heritage values, maximising public accessibility, addressing community needs and ensuring long-term sustainability.

These considerations ensure that should the barracks be decommissioned, the community's vision and priorities are already clearly articulated, leading to better results for all partners.



Figure 5
Soldier looking down Busby's Bore access point at Victoria Barracks. Source: City of Sydney Archives

Site context and history

Historical context

Victoria Barracks is one of Australia's most significant military heritage sites, containing many buildings of architectural interest and representing nearly 2 centuries of continuous military use. Construction of the barracks began in 1841 under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel George Barney of the Royal Engineers.⁵

A decision to build the barracks came from practical necessity. The original military barracks on George Street in the city centre had become increasingly challenged by the 1830s due to deteriorating buildings and their prime location limiting Sydney's commercial growth as the colony and city developed⁶. Paddington was proposed for the new site as it was remote from the town centre offered proximity to good drinking water in Busby's Bore and high ground provided tactical suitability for defence.⁷

The sandstone for the buildings was quarried directly onsite and from nearby areas. Mortar was made from burnt seashells gathered at Rushcutters Bay.⁸ The barracks were constructed by convicts from Norfolk Island penal settlement,⁹ supplemented by around 50 stonemasons and builders, and 5 carpenters.¹⁰

By 1848, the barracks were completed and officially welcomed its first full garrison, when the 11th (North Devonshire) Regiment arrived from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).¹¹

The British military presence continued until 1870, when the 18th Royal Irish Regiment became the last troops from Britain to occupy the barracks.¹² Following the withdrawal of Imperial forces, the barracks transitioned to housing colonial forces, beginning with the 1st Battery of the NSW Artillery.¹³ New buildings were added during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to support specialised units, including Mounted Infantry, the Commissariat and Transport Corps, and the Medical Staff Corps.¹⁴



Figure 6
(top) Victoria Barracks, 1871. Source: Mitchell Library. (middle) Departure of the NSW contingent for the Soudan war, 1885. Source: City of Sydney Archives. (bottom) Military Parade at Victoria Barracks. Source: Powerhouse Museum Collection.



Physical context

Victoria Barracks occupies around 15 hectares bounded by Oxford Street to the north, Greens Road to the west, Moore Park Road to the south and Oatley Road to the east. The site's elevated position on a ridgeline provides expansive views, originally selected for defensive purposes but now offering remarkable vistas across Sydney's eastern suburbs to Botany Bay and north towards the harbour.

The precinct's most significant structure is the Soldier's Quarters building, stretching 225m in length and considered to be the longest sandstone building in the southern hemisphere.¹⁵ This structure originally accommodated 700 British soldiers in rooms where 15 men or 2 families would share quarters.¹⁶ Today, these spaces have been adapted for modern military administrative use while maintaining their historic fabric.

The Officers' Quarters, completed in 1842 as the first building onsite, presents a 2-storey Georgian facade along the eastern edge of the parade ground. This building originally contained the officers' mess on the ground floor, with single officers' quarters at the northern end and family residences at the southern end.¹⁷



Other significant structures include the Guard House (1846) at the Oxford Street entrance, which maintains its original function, the Garrison Hospital (1845), now serving as the officers' mess and the Barrack Master's Quarters, known as The Bungalow (1847), which continues to house senior military personnel.¹⁸ The perimeter wall, constructed of convict-quarried sandstone with defensive loopholes at regular intervals, surrounds the entire site and remains largely intact.

The barracks' grounds feature significant landscaping dating from various periods, including mature Moreton Bay fig trees from the mid-19th century in the Barrack Master's garden, Norfolk Island pines¹⁹ along the main avenue and the central parade ground which has served multiple purposes from military drilling to cricket matches and, occasionally as a training ground for the Wallabies rugby team.

Figure 7
(left) Victoria Barracks, 1871. Source: State Library of NSW (right) Group of Army nurses at Victoria Barracks, c1914. Source: Australian War Memorial

Heritage significance

Victoria Barracks holds exceptional heritage significance at local, state and national levels. The site is listed on the Commonwealth heritage list, and is locally heritage listed, recognising multiple layers of cultural, architectural, historical and social importance.

Architecturally, the precinct contains one of the best groups of colonial sandstone buildings in NSW and represents a rare example of colonial buildings in the Greek Revival style.²⁰

Historically, Victoria Barracks is the most important physical evidence of the state's military history throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is the only surviving substantial military barracks complex built in Australia in the early Victorian period and, along with Anglesea Barracks in Hobart and Lancer Barracks in Parramatta, represents one of the few surviving sites evidencing the British military presence in Australia during the colonial period.²¹

Considerable archaeological potential of the site offers valuable opportunities for future investigation of past construction methods and ways of life.²²

The barracks' social significance extends beyond its military associations. For the Paddington community, the perimeter walls have long defined the neighbourhood's southern boundary, while the site's continuous occupation has made it a constant in Sydney's evolving urban landscape. The precinct provides a strong link between the high-density development of 19th century Paddington and the open space of Moore Park, serving as a barrier between different urban characters.²³



Figure 8
Oblique aerial view of Victoria Barracks, 1970. Source: National Archives.



Figure 9
Japanese Naval Officer playing Tennis at Victoria Barracks, 1924. Source: Australian National Maritime Museum

Talking to our communities

In August to September 2025, we asked local communities about their ideas for the future of Victoria Barracks. Capturing the community's vision and priorities early enables their voices be included in any future planning.

Residents, workers and visitors were asked to imagine Victoria Barracks as a publicly accessible precinct and share their ideas about potential future uses. Through an interactive online mapping tool, surveys and written submissions, we received rich insights into how this significant site could serve Sydney's diverse population while respecting its extraordinary heritage character.

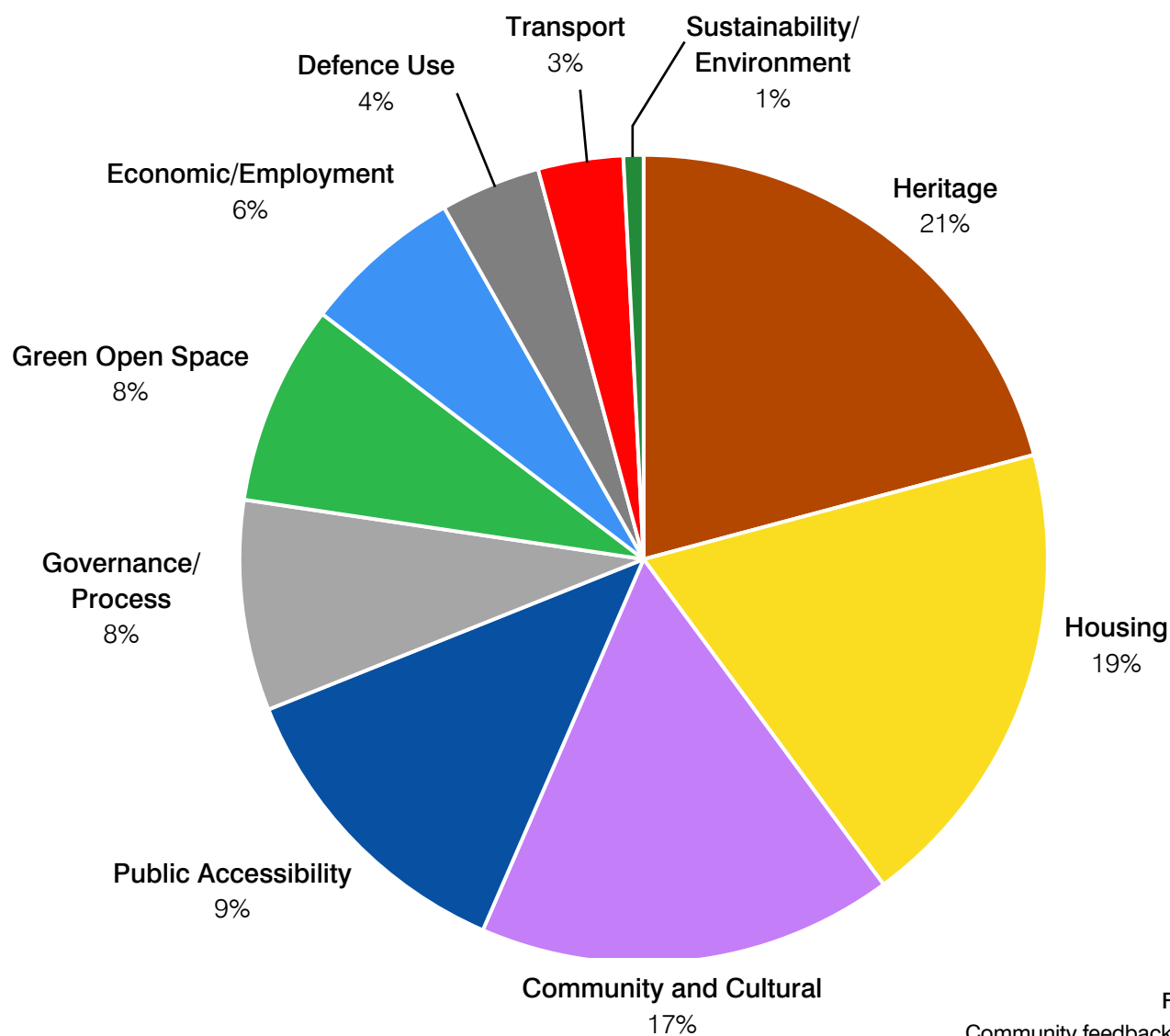


Figure 10
Community feedback themes.
Source: City of Sydney.

Key themes from community feedback

Heritage

Overwhelming consensus showed that heritage conservation must be the foundation of any future use of the site. Responses emphasised that Victoria Barracks represents irreplaceable colonial and military history that must be protected. Many expressed strong opposition to any development that would compromise the site's heritage character, with particular concern about high-rise buildings that would "spoil the visual appeal" and "destroy the heritage significance of the Paddington area."

Public accessibility/green open space

Public accessibility and green open space emerged as a priority. Submissions strongly advocated for opening the site for public access and retaining and enhancing all existing green spaces, with many suggesting the parade ground should become public parkland. Ideas ranged from community gardens and urban farms to recreation areas, outdoor performance spaces and weekly markets.

Housing

Housing generated the most diverse responses. While some participants recognised the housing challenges and supported low-cost/affordable high-density housing, others strongly opposed any residential development, arguing it would "destroy one of Sydney's most important colonial-era landmarks". Those supporting housing emphasised it must include affordable options for key workers and others.

Culture and Community

Cultural and community uses featured prominently, with strong support for museums, galleries, performance spaces and artist studios. Many envisioned an arts precinct that could "cater to professional artists who are already established", others suggested educational facilities or expansion of the existing Army Museum. The proximity to the University of NSW and University of Technology, Sydney sparked suggestions for tertiary facilities or a new public high school.

"Victoria Barracks is a unique and sensitive site that should be preserved for several key reasons... Its military architecture and grounds tell a vital story about Sydney's history and the Australian Defence Force...The barracks contribute to the distinctive character and open green spaces of the neighbourhood..."

"If the site is no longer needed for the ADF, it poses a fantastic opportunity for high quality, high amenity living and community uses in the heart of Sydney. There is great opportunity to increase housing supply, including the provision of at least 30% affordable housing, to support the affordability of inner-city living and housing."

"This site would be ideal for local outdoor events, particularly a regular farmer's market, outdoor concerts (e.g.. classical, opera, jazz), night markets, etc. It is so rare to have open space, that has historical interest, is easily accessible, has parking, and isn't over developed already."

Diverse perspectives on ownership and use

Different stakeholder groups expressed distinct priorities. Local residents were particularly concerned about infrastructure capacity if the site was to be developed. Traffic congestion, parking limitations and the lack of supermarkets and essential services were cited as existing problems that would worsen with intensive development.

Other comments argued the site should remain in public ownership or be transferred to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust rather than be sold to private interests.

Other feedback expressed a view that the site should not be divested and must remain in use by the Australian Defence Force. The final decision rests with the Australian Defence Force.

Community vision

A collective vision emerged of Victoria Barracks as an activated, publicly accessible precinct that honours its military heritage, actively preserves and interprets its history, accommodates diverse activities, and balances Sydney's housing needs with protecting its significant values.



Figure 11: Photo of pop-up markets at Sydney Park. Source: City of Sydney



Figure 12
Kids playing at Matron Grant Ruby Park, Zetland. Source: City of Sydney

Guiding Principles

Informed by the community's input and supported by our strategic directions, these guiding principles are intended to provide a framework for decision-making that balances conservation with adaptation, ensuring the site remains a valued place for future generations.

Any redevelopment should be approached with careful consideration of the site's historical significance, community needs and the potential to create an activated, mixed-use precinct that contributes positively to Sydney's urban fabric.



Figure 13
Sketch of Victoria Barracks. Source: City of Sydney

- 1

Conserve and enhance heritage and military significance
- 2

Maximise public accessibility
- 3

Enhance and expand green open space
- 4

Prioritise cultural and community uses
- 5

Incorporate diverse housing
- 6

Encourage compatible and viable commercial uses
- 7

Encourage resilience and environmental sustainability
- 8

Planning, implementation and management

Principle 1: Conserve and enhance heritage and military significance

Victoria Barracks represents a unique link to Sydney's colonial past and Australia's military heritage. Plans for the site must ensure its history remains clear, accessible and conserved for future generations. The Barracks' heritage should guide adaptation and new uses, creating places that honour the past while serving contemporary community life.

Goals

- Maintain and conserve heritage-listed structures including the perimeter wall, recognising their status as surviving examples of military architecture in Australia.
- Respect the original architectural integrity of heritage buildings including the Officers' Quarters, Soldiers Barracks, Guard House, Garrison Hospital/Officers Mess and Barracks Master's Quarters.
- Protect archaeology within the site, prioritising comprehensive investigation and recording to uncover undocumented historical evidence as part of any redevelopment.
- Develop a comprehensive conservation management plan to guide all future development decisions, identifying elements of high, moderate and low tolerance for change.
- Incorporate interpretive displays and educational elements that communicate the site's First Nations history and military history from British occupation through to its role for Australia's military and significance in Sydney's colonial development.



Figure 14: (left) Soldiers Quarters. Source: Department of the Environment. (right) Public park in Zetland. Source: City of Sydney

Principle 2: Maximise public accessibility



Figure 15: Photo of community festival at Green Square. Source: City of Sydney

The transformation of Victoria Barracks from a restricted military compound to an accessible public part of the local area represents a fundamental shift in its relationship with Sydney. This principle ensures the site becomes genuinely welcoming and inclusive, removing barriers while respecting heritage constraints and creating a place that belongs to all.

Goals

- Encourage universal public access across the site, including green spaces and community/cultural facilities, removing barriers while respecting heritage constraints.
- Prioritise and improve walking connections through the site.
- Explore new openings for walking access to the site which are legible, respect heritage constraints and successfully integrate with the existing street network of Oxford Street, and Moore Park, Oatley and Greens roads.
- Reduce vehicle movements into the site by limiting private vehicle access to the land south and east of the Barracks building and encourage private vehicle access from Moore Park Road.

Principle 3: Enhance and expand green open space

The parade ground and surrounding landscapes should be retained and enhanced as vibrant public parkland where people can gather, play, rest and enjoy the heritage setting. This principle recognises the critical importance of green space in dense urban environments and the opportunity to reconnect the site to Moore Park and Sydney's wider green network.

Goals

- Retain the central landscaped open space and conserve the site's historical layout (including key visual connections/sightlines within the precinct) while providing flexible community orientated uses.
- Dedicate existing and new portions of the site to accessible and flexible public open space uses, drawing on its historical uses as a parade ground
- Ensure the green space connects the site to its surroundings, serving as a link between the high-density suburban development of Paddington and the open space of Moore Park.

Figure 16: Cricket at Victoria Barracks, 1981. Source: National Archives



Principle 4: Prioritise cultural and community uses

Cultural vibrancy defines Sydney as a global city and Victoria Barracks provides an extraordinary opportunity to expand cultural and community infrastructure locally. Redevelopment should contribute to Sydney's cultural life through spaces and programs that connect residents and visitors to our shared heritage and contemporary creativity.

Goals

Public facilities and services

- Encourage the adaptive reuse of existing buildings for cultural and community orientated purposes, exploring opportunities for spaces that serve communities, such as creative production spaces, museums, art galleries, educational centres or public event spaces.
- Consider temporary cultural and creative events and installations that enliven the site's publicly accessible spaces throughout the year, including those reflective of the site's military history.

- Ensure any space allocated for community facilities address identified local needs at the time of development.
- Complement and enhance the programs and activities of Paddington Town Hall and investigate providing vehicle service access to the rear of the building.
- Maintain the existing Army Museum of NSW as a cultural anchor that preserves the site's military heritage while providing educational opportunities.

Accessibility and inclusion

- Incorporate First Nations perspectives and recognition of the land's significance to Aboriginal peoples prior to and post colonial settlement.
- Design and program spaces that welcome diverse community groups and promote intergenerational interaction.



Figure 17: (left) Photo of outdoor cinema. (right) Puppet show at Paddington Reservoir. Source: City of Sydney



Principle 5: Incorporate diverse housing



Figure 18: Zetland Housing. Source: City of Sydney

Victoria Barracks offers a unique opportunity to address Sydney’s housing challenges through thoughtfully designed residential development that respects heritage character.

Goals

Integration and design

- Incorporate a mix of housing types to meet diverse housing demands, including respecting the site’s history through sensitive design and siting of new buildings and/or adaptive reuse of existing buildings.
- Ensure that any housing development maintains existing key sightlines and meets design excellence guidelines.

Affordable housing

- Encourage a socially diverse community by providing a significant proportion of affordable housing owned and operated permanently by registered community housing provider(s).
- Prioritise affordable housing for key workers and others.
- Explore diverse housing typologies that accommodate different household sizes and life stages.

Principle 6: Encourage compatible and viable commercial uses



Figure 19: Tramsheds alfresco dining. Source: Tramsheds

Suitable commercial uses can ensure the precinct remains active throughout the day and evening while generating revenue to support heritage conservation and public facilities.

Goals

Economic viability

- Prioritise commercial uses that complement the site’s heritage character and community functions.
- Develop a sustainable economic model without compromising heritage values.
- Consider a mix of long-term leases and shorter-term activations to provide economic resilience and adaptability.

Compatible commercial activities

- Encourage creative industries, innovation hubs and educational institutions that can adaptively reuse heritage buildings while contributing to the local economy.
- Support small-scale retail, food and beverage outlets that serve site visitors and the broader community.
- Explore opportunities for heritage tourism that uphold the site’s historical significance and generates revenue for ongoing conservation.
- Consider allocating spaces for cultural production and presentation, including galleries, studios, performance venues and creative workspaces.

Principle 7: Encourage environmental sustainability

The transformation of Victoria Barracks lends itself to enhancing ecological values and creating a resilient precinct that effectively responds to and recovers from social, economic and environmental challenges. Built and landscape interventions should reduce carbon emissions, manage stormwater, mitigate heat and support biodiversity. The interventions should integrate heritage stewardship with climate-responsive design.

Goals

Resilience

- Embed resilience principles in spaces, buildings and infrastructure (and their ongoing management) to withstand social, economic and environmental shocks and stresses, and build community resilience.

Biodiversity

- Retain and protect significant plantings made during the site's use as a military barracks. Protect original plantings at the Barrack

Master's garden and significant plantings at the Garrison Hospital/Officers Mess gardens.

- Where appropriate, increase urban tree canopy and biodiversity through new plantings and garden features that enhance ecological value while honouring the site's history.

Environmental sustainability

- Incorporate water-sensitive urban design principles, including stormwater harvesting and reuse systems, acknowledging the site's historical connection to water infrastructure.

Figure 20: Trees at Moore Park. Source: City of Sydney



Principle 8: Robust planning, implementation and management



Figure 21: Community discussing an exhibited master plan. Source: City of Sydney

Successful transformation of Victoria Barracks requires transparent, shared governance and careful action. It should maintain a focus on heritage values and public benefit over time. The site's evolution needs to be guided by clear decision-making processes, appropriate expertise and genuine community involvement.

Goals

Planning and development

- Establish transparent and participatory planning processes that involve the community, given historical public interest and debate regarding the site's use and reuse.

Governance and management

- Set up an advisory forum that includes representation from heritage experts, community members and relevant government agencies.

- Develop a phased approach that allows, where possible, for adaptive management and responds to changing community needs over time.
- Create transparent decision-making processes that include the community.

Financial sustainability

- Balance commercial returns with public benefit to ensure long-term financial sustainability without compromising heritage values.
- Explore innovative funding mechanisms, including public-private partnerships, to support heritage conservation and public facilities.
- Develop a long-term maintenance and conservation fund to ensure care of heritage assets.

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Figure 22
Puppet show at Paddington Reservoir. Source: City of Sydney

