

Item 3.3

Sydney Park Brick Kilns Activation

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

History

The brick kiln and chimney structures in Sydney Park are the largest remaining intact brick kilns in New South Wales. There are three other Sydney brickwork sites in Holroyd, Eastwood and Brookvale and others in New South Wales (Cessnock and Kalaru). These sites are generally not as well preserved or have as many structures as the Sydney Park site. The brick kilns in Sydney Park consist of the Hardy Patent Kiln, Hoffman Patent Kiln, Downdraught Kilns and other structures. The group of buildings are a locally listed heritage item of cultural and historical significance known as the *Former Brickworks Group*.

Various brick, pottery and tile works were established in the area from the early 1800s. Several brickworks operated on the site including Bedford Brick Works from 1893 and Austral Brick Company from 1936 until it ceased operating in 1983.

In 1948, the deep clay brick-pits became a major municipal waste depot for Sydney. It was known by several names including the St Peters tip and household rubbish was dumped there until 1976. When St Peters tip was finally closed, a final layer of soil and building rubble was placed over the former brick-pits to create a new regional park. In 1980, the site was sold to the NSW Government and in 1991, ownership was transferred to South Sydney Council, and then to the City of Sydney when the two councils merged in 2004.

Sydney Park is now a multi-award-winning regional park and includes a skate park, bike track, playground, water harvesting wetlands, a dog pool, Sydney City Farm and Alan Davidson Oval.

Restoration

The brick kilns and chimney structures are subject to an ongoing maintenance program. The City has been working on this program since 2007, when the conservation management plan was prepared. In 2013, the alcoves and internal arches were repaired and propped. In 2015, the roof membrane of the Hoffman kiln was upgraded. In 2017, chimneys 2 and 4 were remediated. In 2020, temporary fencing was erected around Downdraught Kilns 1, 2 and 3 to protect public safety.

The stormwater issues under the site are creating a lot of ground movement, water ingress and steel erosion and the latest condition report identified further works were required.

In August 2022, Council approved the project scope and concept design for the Sydney Park brick kilns heritage renewal works including stabilisation and preservation of the brick kilns, reinstating the roof structures, landscaping, signage, lighting, stormwater and improvements to the precinct as the entryway to Sydney Park. The scope and plan formed the basis for the development application and future tender for the renewal works.

Activation

Over the past year, the City's Design Advisory Panel and its sub-committee has reviewed the heritage renewal works project. The Panel strongly supports the renewal of the brick kilns and chimney structures to improve community access to them to appreciate the heritage significance of the site.

Feedback from the community consultation on the renewal works also indicated a desire to see the brick kilns precinct reactivated. For example, for markets, galleries, food services, live music and art installations. The precinct has historically hosted events such as *The Sound of Red Earth*, a public art installation by Stephen Vitiello and Kaldor Public Art Projects.

Preliminary investigations by staff into activation of the brick kilns revealed it would be a challenging project requiring more detailed consideration due to structural and safety concerns and the potential impacts to the heritage fabric. As a result, the heritage renewal works were pursued separately so they would not be delayed.

The City of Sydney's submission to the NSW Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Policy identifies a crisis in the availability of affordable spaces for creative and cultural activities. Activating the brick kilns would make a small contribution to addressing this shortage while providing unique spaces for our creatives to use and could lead to more projects like *The Sound of Red Earth*.

Next steps

Now that the work to commence the renewal and stabilisation of the brick kilns, chimneys and other structures is underway, further investigations into the feasibility of reactivating one or more of the buildings or structures can be revisited. This should include an assessment of structural stability, safety, building code requirements, heritage protections and financial implications to make the buildings accessible and available for community use.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) the significance of the brick kilns in Sydney Park as the largest remaining intact brick making precinct in New South Wales;
- (ii) a Development Application for the stabilisation of the structures and renewal of the surrounding landscape areas has been lodged and will be publicly notified;
- (iii) consultation feedback revealed support for the stabilisation of the structures and renewal of the surrounding landscape areas and included requests for the City to also consider opportunities for activation of the structures; and
- (iv) preliminary investigations carried out by the City of Sydney indicated that due to structural and safety concerns the structures could not be permanently occupied without significant alterations to the heritage structures. However, further investigations would be required to determine if they can be made accessible and safe for temporary activations; and

- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:
- (i) carry out further investigations on the feasibility and financial implications of activation of the brick kiln structures including making them accessible and available for community and cultural uses; and
 - (ii) report back to Council on the outcomes of the investigation and next steps.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor