

FINAL REPORT - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR
CRL2 WORKS AT FORMER BUKIT TIMAH TURF CLUB

for



SEPTEMBER, 2022



Executive Summary

Introduction

A Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been commissioned by the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore for proposed infrastructure works to support the redevelopment of the former Bukit Timah Turf Club (henceforth referred to in this report as the former Bukit Timah Racecourse to avoid conflation with Singapore Turf Club, the organisation). This HIA report focuses on a subset of infrastructure works which comprises the construction of a new MRT Station (CR14) and associated tunnels for the Cross Island Line Phase 2 (CRL2) alignment. The assessment considers the impacts arising from temporary works, notably tunnelling and open-cut excavations, as well as permanent impacts arising from construction of the new station building and associated works.

The full redevelopment of the former Bukit Timah Racecourse and the associated heritage impacts is the subject of a separate HIA report that will be published subsequently when ready.

This HIA comprises an inspection and recording of the extant buildings and site features and preliminary assessment of condition; a review and summary of readily available archival materials; an evaluation of the heritage significance of the site; a review of the proposed infrastructure plan and the heritage impact that arises from it, and an interpretation plan. The study area of this HIA report is limited to the buildings, structures and sites that would be directly affected by or in close proximity to CR14 and the associated tunnels for CRL2 alignment.

Description of the Former Bukit Timah Racecourse Site

The site was used as a horse racing venue until its closure in 1999. Since 2000, it has been operating in a mixed-use format including a retail shopping mall (located in the former North and South Grandstands) and the Bukit Timah Saddle Club (a riding club), which continues to operate to this day.

The site comprises 98 hectares and contains numerous buildings ranging from major public buildings, principally the North and South Grandstands, to modest workers' quarters, all set in a lush green landscape of mature trees, grassland and topographical features, with distant views north toward the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

The general condition is good, the degree of wear and tear consistent with the age and form of the buildings.

Heritage Value

The heritage value¹ of the site is high. The former Bukit Timah Racecourse operated as a commercial racecourse from 1933 to 1999. It built on the development of the former racecourse at Farrer Park and it proved a commercial and philanthropic success. It was one of many racecourses in South-East Asia founded by expatriates but was soon used by locals from a variety of backgrounds, which was enhanced by the switch in 1960 from being a private members' club to a sporting venue open to the general public. Bukit Timah Racecourse owes its success to this change.

Horse racing in Singapore is closely intertwined with the Singapore Turf Club ("STC") and the Bukit Timah Racecourse. The founding members of the Singapore Sporting Club (the forerunner of the STC) – William Henry Macleod Read and the STC's first chairman - Tan Sri Runme Shaw – were respectively the same people who founded the first racecourse in Singapore, at Farrer Park and the development of Bukit Timah Racecourse. In later years, the STC became an agent of the Singapore Totalisator Board ("Tote Board"), which regulated horse betting. It is therefore fair to say that the development of horse racing in Singapore and the history of STC are synonymous.

The STC and the Bukit Timah Racecourse are, however, mutually distinctive. Whilst STC was instrumental in establishing, and for many years responsible for, running horse racing, the Bukit Timah Racecourse was, and remains, the tangible evidence of it. The racecourse and all that comprises it – the buildings and the spaces between them, the landscape and outward views from the grandstands – embody a strong sense of place that recalls the experience of ordinary people when they visited, including the anticipation and thrill of the race; the serenity of distant views; the grandeur of the major buildings, and the crisply presented landscape.

Overall, the site played a significant part in the life of Singapore at a time when the country had quite recently become independent. The North Grandstand in particular embodied an enterprising spirit that was outward-looking and ambitious for the future. This building represents both the high point of horse racing in terms of the capacity that it provided and the self-confidence of an architectural style that was internationalist rather than colonial.

The site also has intangible heritage value. Beyond the association with STC, the site's value to society is in its representation of the people associated with its growth, development and day-to-day operation. Consideration has also been given to site's recent history from 1999 onwards, during the value assessment process.

¹ Heritage value – a measure of the importance of a heritage asset, typically expressed in terms of its historical, aesthetic and social significance.

Heritage Impact and Assessment

The intention to construct CR14 station within former Bukit Timah Racecourse was considered as part of the planning for CRL2 which runs through areas such as King Albert Park, Clementi, West Coast and Jurong Lake District. CRL2 will shorten travel times for commuters travelling to and from the western parts of Singapore. The proposed CR14 station aims to enhance the accessibility of the site and serve the future developments within Turf City, of which the plans are still under study by URA. It is believed that the proposed project will be beneficial to the future adaptive reuse of the existing historic buildings, namely the North and South Grandstands, Secretaries' Bungalows, Duplex Flat, Saddle Club and other buildings or structure associated with the horse racing history of the site. It is inevitable that the construction of CR14 station and associated tunnels will have some impact on the site's heritage value.

The impact assessment therefore considers the scope for mitigation of identified negative impacts. It concludes that effective mitigation can be applied in two forms - firstly, to minimise the physical and visual impacts on the affected buildings, structure and landscape, and the extent of demolition required; and secondly, to interpret the heritage value of the site more generally. The intended outcome of this is to retain that which is considered valuable yet capable of repurposing, while creating new infrastructure and spaces that acknowledge and draw on the heritage significance of the place.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the proposed construction of CR14 station and associated tunnels within the former Bukit Timah Racecourse site is capable of retaining sufficient heritage value that would tell the story of horse racing at Bukit Timah and more generally in Singapore. There will be heritage impacts, some of which will be moderately adverse, but by retaining most of the extant buildings including the two grandstands, former Secretaries' Bungalows, Duplex Flat, Saddle Club compound and the racetrack, the principal characteristics of the site can be properly conveyed tangibly without diminishing its heritage value.

The conservation guidelines and the interpretation plan outlined in Chapter 8 provide a range of ideas that will assist in mitigating the impacts of the proposed works, and set a series of guidelines that can be referenced for any redevelopment proposals for the site. The overarching intention is to provide future residents and visitors alike with the opportunity to know more about Bukit Timah Racecourse's history and to appreciate the special nature of this place by virtue of conserving the heritage elements of value and improving accessibility to them.

Recommendations

In addition to the mitigation measures set out in this study, it is recommended that a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the site is commissioned. A CMP is typically an authoritative record of the heritage value of a place because it follows in-depth research across a wide range of archival sources. Among other things, a CMP would provide a policy framework that would provide a useful basis for informing the design development and assist any future public engagement measures. Its principal purpose is to facilitate change, which sometimes can be radical in its nature and/or extent, in a manner that is sensitive to the heritage value of a place. As such it can be a valuable tool when considering a change of use of culturally significant sites.