

# Six police buildings in and around Old Police Academy to be proposed for conservation

Decision to retain buildings made after first-of-its-kind heritage impact study undertaken for the roughly 33ha site

## Singapore

SIX police buildings in and around the Old Police Academy will be proposed for conservation and integrated with future developments in the Mount Pleasant area.

The decision to retain the buildings was made after a first-of-its-kind heritage impact study was undertaken for the roughly 33ha Old Police Academy site, said National Development Minister Desmond Lee on Tuesday (Nov 23).

Four of the retained buildings lie within a future Housing Board estate on the site, while the other 2 are just beyond the boundary of the new estate.

"This was the first time we'd done an in-depth heritage study of this scale, which is apt considering the scale of the new housing estate," said Lee during a media briefing.

The former academy is the site of Singapore's first permanent police training facility, established in 1929. It was operational until 2005, when its functions were relocated to the Home Team Academy in Choa Chu Kang.

"It symbolises the transformation of our police training and education—marking the shift from a wooden and attap temporary site to an institution which has enabled our police to grow and to evolve, from keeping order in a British settlement to preserving the peace and prosperity of an independent nation," said Lee, who added that generations of national servicemen and police cadets have fond memories of their experiences on the academy's grounds.

The large-scale independent heritage study, undertaken by the National University of Singapore's Department of Architecture, compared the significance of the various buildings and spaces in the old academy and assessed how the new housing estate could affect the overall heritage significance of the site. It took place between August 2018 and September 2019.

Lee said the development of the new housing estate gave the authorit-



The study found that 9 buildings and areas within the old academy were considered the most significant in the history of Singapore's police force. They are Blocks 1 (pictured), 2, 27, 28 and 153; an old drill shed; a swimming pool; the parade square; and the recreation field. PHOTO: URA

ies an opportunity to pilot the large-scale study, and added that lessons learnt from this study will guide future ones, as well as an ongoing effort to develop a heritage impact assessment framework. More details on this framework will be shared when ready.

The study found that 9 buildings and areas within the old academy were considered the most significant in the history of Singapore's police force. They are Blocks 1, 2, 27, 28 and 153; an old drill shed; a swimming pool; the parade square; and the recreation field.

"This is due to their strong organisational and historical associations, architectural and aesthetic values, as well as deep communal associations with the police in Singapore and Malaysia," said the HDB, Urban Redevelopment Authority and Singapore Land Authority in a joint statement.

Within the future housing estate's boundary, Blocks 1, 2, 27 and 28 will

be retained and proposed for conservation. They will be adapted for new uses.

The 4 blocks were built between 1926 and 1930 as part of the original police academy, and their geographical distribution reflects how the buildings had been laid out according to the terrain – administrative and training functions were located on flat, lower ground, while accommodation and medical facilities were placed on higher and hillier ground.

In particular, Blocks 1 and 2 were the main administrative buildings situated at the original main entrance of the academy in Whitley Road.

They were physical, visual, and symbolic landmarks for trainees, providing the backdrop for parade ground events and graduation photo shoots.

As for Blocks 27 and 28, the pair of colonial-style bungalows were used as senior officers' accommodation.

Each bungalow has a unique butterfly-shaped semi-detached layout with

full-length verandahs, and were designed to suit the tropical weather while retaining English-style design roots.

Situated on high ground, they overlook the academy and are visible from the Pan-Island Expressway.

A part of the parade square will be retained as an open space within the new housing estate.

Meanwhile, 2 buildings outside the housing estate's boundary will also be proposed for conservation.

Construction for Block 13 began in 1928 and it was used as a clinic and hospital ward. It also served as the primary entry point to the medical centre.

Built in the style of plantation houses, the building was designed with surrounding verandahs and large timber shutters for natural ventilation.

Also outside the boundary is Block 153, also known as the Senior Police Officers' Mess.

This building – built in 1931 – is deemed the foundation of the force's esprit de corps, having hosted many formal gatherings, official functions and events, such as festive celebrations, weddings, networking and socialisation events for serving and retired officers.

For buildings and spaces that cannot be retained in their entirety, Lee said HDB will explore various strategies to retain and showcase their heritage significance in the new housing estate's design.

The heritage study's full report has been published on HDB's website, and is open for public feedback for 1 month.

Lee also said that engagement on future plans for the housing estate will include a new workgroup comprising members of the police fraternity, the heritage community as well as government agencies.

The workgroup will be chaired by Minister of State for Home Affairs and National Development Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, and will collaborate to develop plans to retain and to showcase the unique heritage identity of the area, within the design of the new HDB estate. THE STRAITS TIMES