



The Hon Andrew Gee MP  
Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel

Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Our Ref: MC21-003011

Ms Terri Butler MP  
Member for Griffith  
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Dear Ms Butler

*Terri*

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the former Australian Red Cross Hall in Greenslopes.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs engaged a specialist heritage architect and quantity surveyor to consider a number of options for the extant buildings, including 'adaptive re-use'.

Obtaining a Certificate of Occupancy would require the removal of hazardous materials that were used extensively throughout the construction of the buildings, replacement of major building systems, and structural alterations to meet the requirements of Australian building standards and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The buildings would also require new electrical, plumbing, fire management, and Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning systems to become compliant. The cost of such extensive works made the 'adaptive re-use' option impractical.

Following consultation with the Greenslopes community, the Department of Veterans' Affairs made a referral to the Environment Minister under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* seeking approval to fully remediate the site by removing the buildings and contaminated soil and selling the land to the Brisbane City Council. The Environment Minister has decided the proposed action will be a 'controlled action' under Section 28 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, which governs actions by the Commonwealth. Consequently, the Department of Veterans' Affairs is preparing additional material in conjunction with specialist environmental scientists and heritage architects to assist the Environment Minister in reaching a decision regarding the proposed action.

Given the site's link with the community over such a long period, the Brisbane City Council is uniquely placed to ensure the site can be returned to the community as an urban commons for use by the people of Greenslopes and visitors to the hospital alike, while incorporating heritage elements to commemorate the historic value of the site. The conditions of sale will stipulate the Brisbane City Council must use the site for this purpose with an option to provide some of the land to Legacy Queensland for a new state headquarters delivering services to veterans and their families for years to come. This is both an important social outcome and will create an enduring link with the history of the site.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has commissioned a Heritage Interpretive Strategy that will be provided to the Brisbane City Council as part of the sale conditions. The remediation of the site will retain some of the prominent architectural elements, such as the period gates and part of the pedimented brickwork of the hall façade providing a physical connection with site's Red Cross history.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has already commissioned and received an archival photographic record of the existing site, including terrestrial and aerial drone photography, and the buildings were laser scanned to create archival plans. These will also be gifted to the Brisbane City Council as part of the sale.

Furthermore, the Department of Veterans' Affairs has engaged the heritage architect to search for and restore missing architectural elements, such as the ironwork depicting the Red Cross emblem and brass plaque from the main hall. If these cannot be located and restored to the site, the Heritage Interpretive Strategy will include options to recreate these historic elements for incorporation into the future park design.

The site is currently owned by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The site will be sold to the Brisbane City Council once remediation work has been completed. A structural engineer's report from May 2019 shows the buildings are generally sound in terms of the underlying structure with some degradation of fascia elements and the timber on the external stairs.

Asbestos was used throughout the construction of the building. The Department of Veterans' Affairs has commissioned a number of reports regarding contamination and hazardous materials on the site, including active airborne asbestos testing conducted on five separate days in September 2020. Samples were collected in accordance with Australian Standards on all four boundaries on each day and conclusively show no asbestos is airborne from the site.

Any hazardous material or contamination on the site is contained and the community protected from accidental exposure by security fencing and signs. A local security company patrols the site four times per day.

The proposed remediation process will be managed by an experienced environmental scientist (a 'suitably qualified person' certified under Queensland environmental law), overseen by an independent Contaminated Land Auditor. Finally, the remediation itself will be undertaken by an experienced environmental engineering company using appropriately certified staff.

As you would be aware, consultation with the Greenslopes community has been conducted by both the Brisbane City Council and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The Brisbane City Council has undertaken two letter-drops in the area surrounding the site and has also doorknocked. The Department of Veterans' Affairs conducted a widespread letter-drop to several thousand households throughout the suburb of Greenslopes and provided a submissions mailbox to collect feedback over a two week period.

According to the Heritage Impact Assessment, the use of the recreation hall for its original intended repatriation hospital purposes had largely ceased by the early 1970's. Given the last 50 years of the hall's history has been as a community asset, a focus on consultation with the Greenslopes community was considered appropriate.

Thank you again for your correspondence. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



**ANDREW GEE**

9/12/2021