

National Trust of Australia (NSW) Position Paper – Victoria Barracks

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SUMMARY

Victoria Barracks is one of the most exceptionally significant heritage sites in Australia. Construction commenced in 1841, and the whole complex was ready for occupation by 1848. The Barracks have been described by multiple authors as one of the finest and most important examples of colonial military architecture in Australia, with noted architectural historian Morton Herman describing it as “*a true museum piece of late Georgian architecture: a museum piece, moreover, that is in complete and active use – surely the ideal for any old building.*” The main Barrack Block is reputed to be the longest stone building in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Victoria Barracks were listed by the National Trust in February 1974. The Precinct is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List as “the finest complex of colonial barracks (pre 1850) in Australia and is still in military use.”

Victoria Barracks is the only substantial military barracks complex built in Australia from the earliest Victorian period, and the only one with a surviving perimeter wall defensive system.

Victoria Barracks was located on the ridge with defensive views of Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay. The Barracks were originally occupied by the British, then the Colonial, and now the Australian armies. It remains an active military base and is the Army Headquarters, Forces Command.

The housing required for the construction of the Barracks saw the suburb of Paddington soon emerge.

The Australian Army has always celebrated its proud military history. Victoria Barracks is a special part of that proud military history and remains in excellent condition.

In 2023 it was reported that the Commonwealth Government was reviewing its estate and rumours suggested that the ownership of Victoria Barracks was being reviewed. Considering the significant Defence land ownership in Australia, this 15 hectare site should remain in Defence hands.

NATIONAL TRUST POSITION

- That Victoria Barracks should continue in Defence ownership, with its continuous use for military purposes for over 180 years being a key part of its cultural significance.
- That all buildings and landscape of exceptional, high, and moderate significance should be considered as a whole and retained.
- That any future uses should be for defence or for the public and not for private use.
- That the skylines of the men’s barracks and the officer’s barracks viewed from the Queen Victoria Gate should remain undisturbed
- That any new development adjacent to the Victoria Barracks be a sensitive design so as to retain the spatial quality of the site.
- That ongoing works to Victoria Barracks be guided by a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan.

ACTION TO PROMOTE THE TRUST’S POSITION

The Trust will continue to advocate for the ongoing conservation and careful management of the Victoria Barracks, reflecting its importance to the architectural, military and social history of Australia.
