

GILLMAN BARRACKS

Final Report



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Housing & Development Board (HDB)

Lead Consultant
Studio Lapis Conservation Pte Ltd

With regards to
CONSULTANCY SERVICES TO CONDUCT HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR GILLMAN BARRACKS SITE (L/293/24)

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Executive Summary

Overview

This Final Report has been prepared to evaluate the heritage attributes and significance of Gillman Barracks Study Area including her built structures and landscapes. The Study Area consists of Core and Non-Core areas, the boundary of which forms only a section of the larger historical Gillman Barracks broadly characterised by the early period of development into a military complex by the colonial Government in 1935.

The Final Report includes a matrix devised for the systematic evaluation of significance and elaborates on the historical contexts that produced this unique landscape, the characterisation of each of the seven clusters identified, and dives into the character defining attributes of a few select examples to illustrate the types of values observed in different typological forms and from different periods of development.

Evaluation Approach for Significance

This study adopts a values-based approach to assess significance, focusing on four key indicators: Historical Value, Architectural Value, Social and Communal Value, and Group and Setting Value. These dimensions consider the extent to which each structure or element embodies, reflects, or communicates important aspects of Singapore's military, architectural, and social history. The study also considers three additional dimensions that inform each value indicator - Intactness, Legibility, and Representation.

The assessment of significance is also informed by the Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework (co-published by Getty Conservation Institute and ICOMOS ISC20C). Contextual themes common to the twentieth century in the spheres of social, political, economic and geographic conditions are woven into the historical analysis of the site. This explains both the influences that produced the landscape of Gillman Barracks and the impacts it in turn had on other places, economies and communities.

These criteria provide a robust framework to identify and differentiate the heritage significance across the various elements of the site. Each structure is thus assessed not only for its individual merit, but also in terms of its contribution to the collective significance of Gillman Barracks as a historic military precinct and evolving cultural landscape.

Study of Communities

The study of communities of Gillman Barracks explores how the site continues to hold meaning for communities through collective identity, memory, and shared experience. Social value is understood from community perceptions of identity, distinctiveness, and belonging, expressed through lived experience and collective memories evolved over time.

Findings highlight that social significance at Gillman Barracks arises from its role as a highly structured and planned compound, where regimented training, education, and communal living fostered enduring bonds. The site has historically nurtured “structured communities”—organised groups formed through shared institutional experiences and a common ethos—whose networks and collective identities often extend far beyond the site itself.

Gillman Barracks holds layered social significance as a reference point for identity, a place of social interaction and cohesion, a formative environment shaping values and practices, and a locus of collective memory. Recognising these enduring attachments affirms its continuing importance within Singapore's social and cultural landscape, guiding future conservation and engagement efforts.

Heritage Significance of Gillman Barracks

Gillman Barracks is a historically and architecturally significant former military complex constructed in the 1930s by the British War Office. Originally serving as a self-contained cantonment, it is a rare and well-preserved example of colonial military planning in Singapore, reflecting both strategic defence roles and a focus on welfare provision for service families. The site remained in institutional use until the 1990s, most notably as the headquarters of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) School of Combat Engineering. Architecturally, it comprises a cohesive ensemble of colonial-era buildings adapted to the tropical climate, with distinctive planning that reflects military hierarchies and environmental considerations. Its strategic location near the Southern coastline and its role in broader defence operations further contribute to its contextual value. Today, the barracks has been adaptively reused as a contemporary arts and lifestyle cluster, maintaining its historical resonance while contributing to Singapore's cultural landscape.

Subsequent landscape changes and redevelopment pressures from the 1970s to 1990s have resulted in the loss of significant portions of the original built fabric and landform, including the former barracks cluster and parade square, now largely subsumed within the wooded

area east of Malan Road. The former married quarters and Railway Hill have also been demolished and levelled respectively. This has fragmented the spatial coherence of the original military compound, where built and landscape elements once operated as an integrated system. The remaining military landscapes and structures are therefore important in understanding the site's original organisation and should be carefully considered in future planning, with opportunities to recall lost elements through heritage interpretation where appropriate.

Heritage Significance of the Clusters

Collectively, these clusters embody the layered military, architectural, and social histories of Gillman Barracks. Their varying functions, forms, and states of preservation contribute richly to the site's overall heritage significance and present strong cases for continued conservation and sensitive adaptive reuse.

Lock Road Cluster

Lock Road represents one of the most intact sections of the original 1935 development and served a multifunctional role, housing administrative offices, officer and sergeant messes, and stores. The continuity of military use until 1993—by British forces, Royal Engineers, and later the SAF—has helped preserve the site's authenticity and legibility. The spatial layout and architectural expression of buildings such as Blocks 5, 6, 7, 9, and 22 reflect institutional hierarchies and thoughtful siting that adapted to the natural terrain. Lock Road also holds strong communal value, with its messes and workspaces serving as important venues for regimented social interaction, camaraderie, and operational life.

Malan Road Cluster

Malan Road also retains significant vestiges of the original garrison and was historically organized around key functions: the elevated Barrack Hill housed single-men's accommodations and a parade square, while the southern lowlands supported industrial and logistical operations. Although some structures have been demolished, remaining buildings continue to convey the planning logic and functional zoning of a hierarchical military complex. The area's social significance is reinforced through its communal workspaces and the structured living arrangements that defined life in the camp for generations of servicemen.

Executive Summary

Preston Road Housing Cluster

Preston Road comprises a rare and well-preserved group of 1930s semi-detached houses that exemplify colonial-era military family housing. Likely used by non-commissioned officers with families, these homes demonstrate a high level of architectural intactness and were thoughtfully designed for tropical living. Their siting along 'Friendly Hill' reflects both practical and symbolic considerations, offering commanding views and proximity to the former garrison school. The cluster remains a tangible and evocative representation of the family-oriented dimension of Gillman Barracks' original planning intent.

Preston Road School Cluster

The former Alexandra School is a rare and significant example of a purpose-built garrison school complex in Singapore, with an exceptional continuity of educational use from the pre-war period to the present day. It is the oldest surviving military children's school complex on the island and embodies both architectural and social heritage value. Its development reflects early efforts by the British War Office to support military families through formal education infrastructure, predating post-war education reforms. The site's layered architectural evolution, from pre-war T-shaped classroom blocks to post-war quadrangle layouts, mirrors pedagogical shifts over time. The school also fostered strong connections with the wider Gillman Barracks, reinforcing its role in shaping childhood experiences within the garrison community.

(Former) St Andrew's Junior College Cluster

Established in 1979 as a joint effort by Christian denominations and integrated into the Telok Blangah New Town plan, St. Andrew's Junior College (SAJC) is a notable example of modernist institutional architecture in a tropical setting. Designed by DP Architects, the campus layout emphasized informality, openness, and responsiveness to topography. Though subsequent alterations have reduced some legibility, key features such as the central plaza, auditorium, and main block remain as landmarks with strong social memory for past students and educators. Today, the site continues its educational legacy as home to the Academy of Singapore Teachers.

(Former) Pasir Panjang Vocational Institute Cluster

The Pasir Panjang Vocational Institute (PPVI) represents Singapore's early nation-building efforts in technical education during the post-independence era. Established in 1972 within repurposed military infrastructure, it exemplifies pragmatic, rapid deployment of training

institutions to meet urgent industrial manpower needs. Strategically located near port and shipyard industries, PPVI was central to training skilled workers—especially in metal trades such as welding—for the burgeoning maritime and offshore sectors. Its prominence as the largest and best-equipped metal trades training school in the region underscores its pivotal role in Singapore's industrial transformation.

Telok Blangah Public Utilities Cluster

The Telok Blangah Public Utilities Cluster represents an ensemble of critical infrastructure established in the late 1960s and early 1970s to support the development of Telok Blangah New Town. Comprising an electrical substation, pumping station, and the former Public Utilities Board (PUB) Telok Blangah Complex, the cluster reflects Singapore's rapid urbanization and the coordinated delivery of utilities for a planned township intended to house 70,000 residents.

Heritage Significance of the Buildings and Landscape Elements

Please refer to map and table in the following page.

Heritage Impact Assessment

A Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) was carried out for the Gillman Barracks area, which is being studied by agencies for future redevelopment into a residential estate. Based on a proposed conceptual plan provided by agencies, the HIA seeks to identify potential heritage impacts on the site and recommend measures to avoid, minimise or mitigate adverse effects while supporting future development objectives. Agencies are studying to retain all 4 buildings scored as 'Exceptional' and 21 of 27 buildings scored 'High'.

The assessment adopts common approaches drawn from HIA studies conducted internationally that evaluates how proposed interventions may affect the heritage significance, character and legibility of the site. Given the concentration of historically and thematically related buildings within Gillman Barracks, the assessment is undertaken at the cluster level to better understand the cumulative heritage value of groups of structures and their surrounding context.

Each cluster is assessed through a framework comprising four planning themes: Fabric & Form, Function, Access and Context. A Tolerance for Change appraisal is assigned to each based on its characteristics. The framework is then used to identify potential heritage impacts associated with the conceptual plan, as well as opportunities, recommendations and mitigation measures.

Heritage Interpretation Plan

The Heritage Interpretation Plan for Gillman Barracks sets out a framework to reveal, connect, and communicate the site's layered histories through an interpretive approach rooted in its physical and cultural landscape. Responding to the site's context, the plan includes strategies that enhance access and connectivity linking existing green corridors with new parks, making use of topographical high points for panoramic interpretation of the wider terrain, and establishing integrated, intuitive wayfinding networks that guide visitors through narratives embedded in the landscape itself.

A key aim of the interpretation plan is to recall lost structures and landscapes throughout the site and conveying how the site used to be used historically in its more holistic configurations, revealing former spatial relationships and stories that convey the historic daily rhythms of the site. It includes recommendations for stakeholders to consider in future planning for the site. These recommendations may also evolve over time in response to changing needs, available technologies, stakeholder priorities and site-specific constraints.

The interpretive framework is structured around three interrelated heritage themes that together trace Gillman Barracks' transformation from a colonial military enclave to a civic and cultural landscape of contemporary Singapore.

1. Terrain and Military Strategy

Explores the former landscapes of Gillman Barracks in connection with its strategic use as a military site and the extent of changes in the landscape.

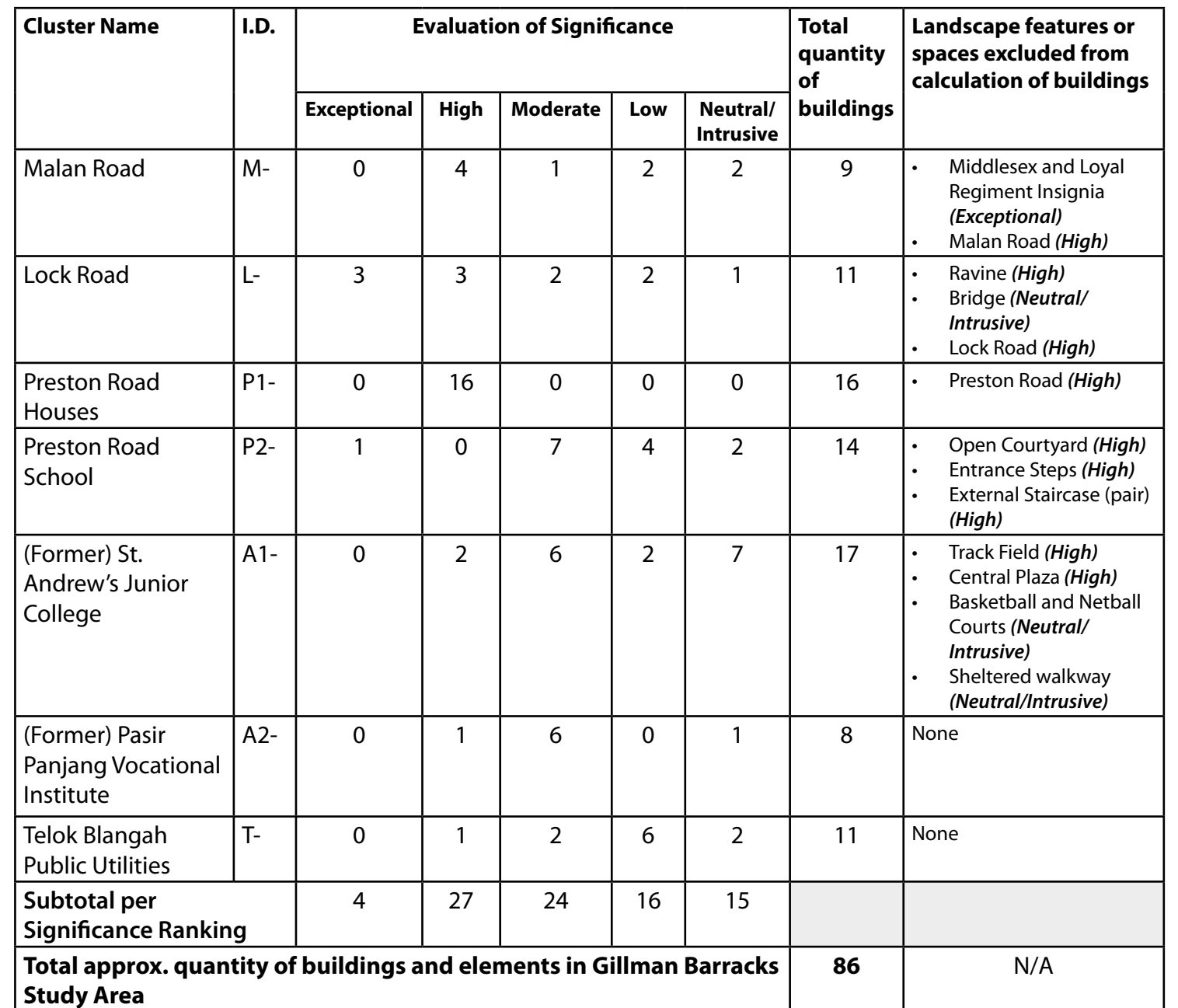
2. Military Welfare and Wellbeing

Explores the daily life and rhythms of the military communities of the site as well as the extant and lost structures where the social lives used to play out.

3. Evolving Educational Pedagogy and Curricula

Explores the history and landscape of schools and other educational institutions across the entire site.

Summary of Heritage Significance of Buildings and Landscape Elements in Study Area



[LEFT] Fig. 1 Overview of Study Area with indication of Neutral/Intrusive, Low, Moderate, High, and Exceptional Significance assessment of extant structures and landscape features. Source: Studio Lapis

	Study Area	
	Core Study Area	(Non-building)
	Exceptional Significance	
	High Significance	
	Moderate Significance	
	Low Significance	
	Neutral/ Intrusive	