

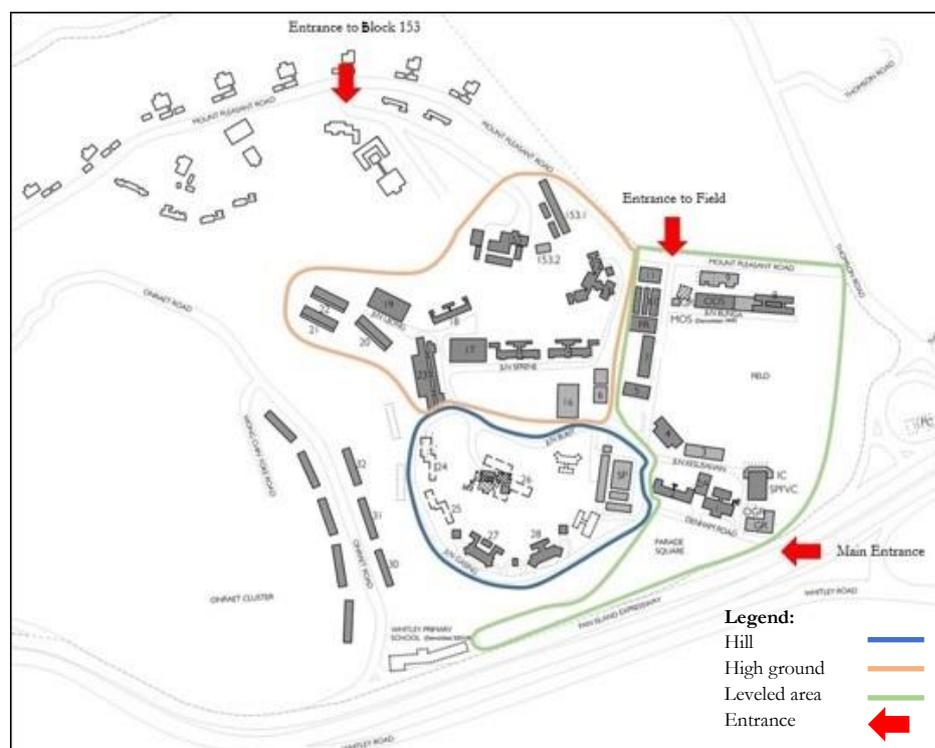
Executive Summary

Background and objectives

The Old Police Academy (OPA) site is located at 1 Mount Pleasant Road of Singapore. Covering an area of 25 ha within the Novena planning area, the site is zoned as residential.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority, Housing & Development Board, and National Heritage Board commissioned the Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore to conduct an in-depth heritage study that will contribute to informing decision making at the level of master planning and building design pertaining to the heritage building cluster at the OPA and its immediate surroundings. It will advise on ways to integrate findings into the proposed redevelopment plans with the view of identifying mitigation measures to balance the development potential and the heritage elements of the site to minimise adverse impact to its significance and enhance positive outcomes for the site.

The research was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 (Aug 2018 – Jan 2019) dealt with the assessment of the significance of the OPA site and buildings (core study area) and its immediate surroundings (buffer zone) to articulate the cultural heritage significance of the OPA. Phase 2 (Jan-Sep 2019) was the heritage impact analysis to evaluate the impact of potential new housing estate with supporting infrastructure and amenities on the significance of the OPA.



Site plan of the Old Police Academy showing buildings blocks and the immediate surroundings, 2019. (Source: Author)

Significance

The OPA played a vital role in the development of police force in Straits Settlements and had been directly associated with the establishment and growth of Singapore earlier as a British settlement from 1819 until 1959 and later as an independent nation since 1965. The OPA has evolved with the Mount Pleasant area from Chinese immigrants' time, through the British settlement period and Japanese occupation during the Second World War, to the present day. The establishment of the Police Training Depot at Mount Pleasant in 1929 marked the first time British Singapore had a permanent institution to train and professionalise its law enforcement body in the Straits Settlements. Since its establishment, it has been a centre for innovation in police training and education of recruits until its closure in 2005.

The OPA is significant because the layout of its buildings, grounds, and associated features, which include evidence of the history of, and significant changes in, police training and education, institutional design, social attitudes and economic development over eight decades. Some buildings and open areas are of significance in their own right for strong historical associations, architectural and aesthetic values, and deep communal associations for police in Singapore and Malaysia. Block 1, 2, 27, 28, 153, Old Drill Shed, Swimming Pool, Parade Square and Recreation Field comprise what are arguably the most significant buildings/open areas in the history of the Police Force in Singapore, contributing to and supporting the existence and appreciation of various qualities of the OPA.

The OPA not only provided police training and education to its recruits but also was home to many married recruits and their families. Partly furnished quarters for probationers were provided for free and were designed to provide maximum comfort to the police recruits and their accompanying families. The barracks in the Academy are fine examples of British colonial architecture in Singapore that may have influenced the design of later barracks and Straits Settlements Police buildings in Singapore and Malaysia.

The evolution of police force and the vital role of sports, both reflecting and leading changes in training and social activities in the wider community, is strongly reflected in the spatial and temporal distribution of facilities, and these features also have strong social significance for parts of the current and former police personnel. The Academy grounds and Old Drill Shed have substantial strong and unique associations with particular communities for social and cultural reasons. These communities and group include current and former Singapore Police Force (SPF) personnel, SPF National Servicemen, and local Singaporeans.



Block 1, 2019. (Source: Author)



Block 2, 2019. (Source: Author)



Block 27, 2019. (Source: Author)



Parade Square, 2019. (Source: Author)



Block 28, 2019. (Source: Author)



Block 153, 2019. (Source: Author)



Old Drill Shed, 2019. (Source: Author)



Swimming Pool Complex, 2019. (Source: Author)



Recreation Field, 2019. (Source: Author)

Proposed development

The proposed conceptual land use plan (updated and provided by URA/HDB in Sept 2021) aims to redevelop the OPA into a housing estate that is well served by public infrastructure and supporting amenities, which may include a bus interchange, Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) connectivity, parks and community uses. These uses may be subject to future changes. Block 1, 2, 27, 28, 13, 153 are proposed for adaptive building reuse to meet various required standards of structural upgrading, building services and conservation guidelines to facilitate their new functional program.

The conceptual land use plan also proposes to retain Block 27 and 28, located next to the integrated development, for commercial use, to allow public access and more appreciation of the heritage. Block 28 annex will be kept and adapted for re-use, to meaningfully integrate with plaza and surrounding public space. Block 1 and Block 2 are proposed for police-related and community uses. The former Parade Square will be used as a park / community commons. The Senior Police Officers' Mess (Block 153) will continue its use and Block 13 will be put to a suitable use. The remainder of most of the site is proposed to be developed as residential flats.

The proposed conceptual land use plan is largely shaped by the existing topography of the site. Kopi Sua Cemetery to the west is avoided from road network development in order to avoid impacting existing graves and reducing impact on biodiversity around the OPA site (surrounding forested areas). The rest of the site is proposed to be re-contoured to meet technical requirements associated with the construction of housing and new roads.

Impact assessment and mitigation measures

The proposed conceptual land use plan (updated and provided by URA/HDB in Sept 2021) to redevelop the OPA to meet the demand for housing well-served by public infrastructure and located at the fringe of the city has attempted to minimise potential adverse impacts that would affect its character-defining elements and suggest mitigation measures to reduce the impacts as necessary. Most of the proposed mitigation measures are to enhance and not compromise the cultural significance of the historic site. These include planning interpretation actions that help users to understand cultural values associated with the OPA; adaptive reuse of selected significant buildings; developing ways to integrate the new development into the existing physical features of the site to reinforce the character of the historic fabric, and restoration of character-defining elements according to original drawings and photographs.

Blocks 1, 2, 27, 28, and 13 are proposed for adaptive reuse as commercial and community uses, in view of their significance to the OPA site and the opportunity for these blocks to be repurposed meaningfully in the proposed new development. At the detailed design stage, further efforts can be put in to preserve and even enhance the historic character of the site by giving more consideration to existing site elements and their relationship to each other and to make sure that more buildings are provided with a new lease of life through creative adaptive reuse for contemporary functions to ensure continuity of built heritage and memory of the police training and development.