

Report lists ways to lessen impact of Turf City station

Keeping buildings like former Turf Club's grandstands will help retain area's history

Clement Yong

The construction of a Cross Island Line (CRL) MRT station at the former Bukit Timah Turf Club will affect the site's heritage value, but keeping many of the buildings – including the two grandstands – will help retain the area's history.

A heritage impact assessment report released on Monday concluded that it is possible to retain "sufficient heritage value" within the former racecourse site while building Turf City station, despite the "inevitable" need to destroy some structures in the process.

It recommended preserving several historical sites of high or exceptional importance, including the grandstands, former secretaries' bungalows, duplex flat and Saddle Club compound.

But parts of the racetrack, parts of the stables and the hay barn will be demolished.

The report, commissioned by the authorities, follows an announcement in September that Turf City station will be sited underneath the former Bukit Timah Turf Club horse-racing tracks. The station is one of six in the CRL's phase two, which is slated to open in 2032.

The news sparked concern among heritage watchers that extensive construction work would damage historical buildings of high heritage value.

For instance, the two grandstands were where the public used

to watch and bet on horse races until 1999, with horse racing one of Singapore's earlier mass spectator sports, together with cricket.

The venue is also closely associated with the Singapore Turf Club, formerly the Singapore Sporting Club, set up in 1842 and which organised horse races twice a year.

As one of many racecourses founded by expatriates in South-east Asia, the site also speaks to the region's colonial legacy, and how these places were later reclaimed by locals from a wide variety of backgrounds.

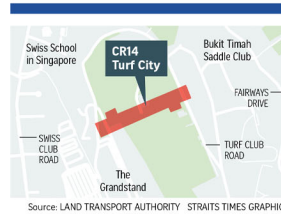
The heritage assessment was conducted by the National University of Singapore's department of architecture and heritage consultant Parcel, and focuses specifically on areas immediately affected by and near to the Turf City station works.

These include tunnelling and open-cut excavations that will take place near preserved structures.

Contractors should come up with a protection plan for the buildings that are being kept, the report said, and set up temporary protective structures to minimise disturbance to these buildings.

Any new infrastructure such as the station entrances should be mindful of heritage elements, it added.

The report also highlighted the importance of proper documentation of areas where changes are made to the site, including via 3D scanning and drone surveys "as it stands as the last chance to record



Source: LAND TRANSPORT AUTHORITY STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

before the historic fabric is lost".

A separate heritage report on the full redevelopment of the former Bukit Timah Turf Club, which is earmarked for housing, will be published at a later date.

According to the Urban Redevelopment Authority's website, the heritage impact report for Turf City station was completed first due to the urgency of starting MRT works to meet transport demand.

Among the Turf City tenants, Bukit Timah Saddle Club has already been asked to return a 0.5ha area from the first half of 2023 for a worksite to support tunnelling works for the CRL. Leases for other tenants expire on Dec 31, 2023.

International Council of Monuments and Sites Singapore president Yeo Kang Shua said he hoped planners of future residential and MRT developments can appreciate historical sites as a whole, instead of fragmenting elements into isolated parts.

While the demolition of some

structures is understandable, "a spectrum of tangible heritage, from the more important structures like the grandstand and secretaries' bungalows to supporting structures like stables will have to be kept to tell the site's complete history", said Dr Yeo, who is associate professor of architectural history at the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

Heritage enthusiast and blogger Jerome Lim said the former turf club was designed as a large integrated development. In its heyday, its scale was unprecedented in Singapore's history and formed perhaps the single largest sporting complex. Its size resembled spaces in the English countryside, he said.

"It would really be a shame if intensification of use alters this drastically. We are in need of verdant open spaces," he said. "Hopefully, we are able to look beyond heritage structures and take into account their context in the space."

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Right: The North Grandstand at the former Bukit Timah Turf Club.

Below, left: Bungalows in the Turf City area boast a variety of architectural styles, including the modernist.

Below, right: A colonial-style bungalow adapted for the tropical climate.

PHOTOS: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT STUDY FOR TURF CITY MRT STATION



Right: The view of the racetrack from the North Grandstand. The study recommended that the grandstands and parts of the racetrack be preserved.

