

## **Former Hoffman Brickworks (H0703)**

### **Q&As**

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#### **Background**

The Former Hoffman Brickworks is included in the Victorian Heritage Register for its historical, archaeological, architectural, historical and scientific significance to Victoria. The heritage place includes the two kilns, the standalone chimney, the machinery and equipment which was used in the brick manufacturing process, and the former engine house.

In mid-2020 the roof of the former engine house catastrophically collapsed. Moreland City Council issued an emergency order which stabilised the remaining brick walls of the building. This required the installation of substantial propping and concrete pad footings inside the building.

The ground beneath the former engine house and adjacent area is contaminated. The contamination relates to the use of the site as a brickworks, and includes oils, petrochemicals and other contaminants which are now affecting the ground and groundwater. In March 2020 the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) issued a notice to the owners which required the removal of contamination from the site.

In August 2021 Heritage Victoria received an expert contamination report. The report concluded that approximately 3-6 metres of soil beneath the building needs to be removed to clean up the contamination and comply with the EPA notice.

#### **What has happened?**

In late 2021 Moreland City Council issued an emergency order requiring the brick pressing shed, which has one wall adjoining the former engine house, to be dismantled. The brick pressing shed was structurally unsafe and dismantling was necessary to avoid danger to life. The dismantling of the brick pressing shed commenced at the end of 2021 and is near completion.

In late 2021 the owner of the building applied to dismantle the remaining walls of the former engine house. While the walls of the building are currently stable, the walls and concrete pad footings which support the propping need to be removed for the decontamination work to proceed.

On 25 January 2022 Heritage Victoria issued heritage permit P36023 for the demolition of the former engine house. The permit application was advertised for two weeks in December, 10 objections were received and all were considered in the decision making process.

Heritage Victoria acknowledges that the demolition of the former engine house will have a substantial and negative impact on the place, resulting from the loss of that building and also from the cumulative loss of heritage buildings on that site since the closure of the brickworks.

Further, demolition of a heritage building is a poor heritage outcome which is only approved by Heritage Victoria in rare circumstances. In this case, Heritage Victoria accepts that demolition of the former engine house is the only viable option for providing access to the ground below the building to enable the investigations and remediation required to remove contamination from the site. These works are required by the EPA Clean Up Notice issued to Sungrove Corporation in February 2020.

It is also accepted that the former engine house was not adequately maintained or protected over an extended time, and this resulted in the catastrophic collapse of the roof in 2020. The roof and

floors of the building no longer exist. The four walls remain but they have been partially dismantled and their structural viability is substantially compromised.

The combination of both the requirements of access for contamination clean up works, and the compromised condition of the walls has led to the reluctant acceptance by Heritage Victoria that the building must be demolished.

The heritage permit requires the bricks of the former engine house to be salvaged, cleaned up and stored for incorporation in any future building on the site. Heritage Victoria has a strong expectation that any new building in the south west corner of the site will include a substantial, engaging and well-developed interpretation centre which outlines the history of the site, and is readily accessible to the local community and wider public. It is also expected that any new building proposed for the site of the former engine house is designed with reference to the materiality, form and character of the former engine house. Particular attention must be given to the treatment of the Dawson Street façade as this made a significant contribution to the Dawson Street streetscape. The design and rebuilding of any future building must also reference best practice conservation principles. Great care must be taken to avoid the pitfalls and lack of authenticity associated with facadism. It must be clear if a new structure has been designed to be direct replica of the original, or a contemporary interpretation with reference to the original. Any in-between option may lead to a lack of clarity as to what is old and new.

While the demolition of the former engine house (and the brick pressing shed adjacent) is deeply regrettable, this provides an opportunity to find a solution to the many protracted issues that have been associated with the site for more than 20 years. If the process of finding a new use for this corner of the site is well managed and negotiated, there is an opportunity to make a positive impact on the cultural heritage values associated with the site, to assist in protecting the heritage of Hoffman Brickworks into the future.