

Memo

1 October 2018

To: Graham Hooper, Community Facilities
cc: Rebecca Fogel, Built Heritage Implementation Team
From: Tanya Sorrell, Team Leader Built and Cultural Heritage Policy

Subject: Waikaraka Park Grandstand – Heritage Perspective on Options

I have been asked to develop a high-level heritage view of several proposed options for the renewal of Waikaraka Park Grandstand. The purpose of this is to assist with the scope of options being considered and to provide strategic advice on reducing and avoiding adverse effects on the heritage place, regardless of the option which is ultimately chosen.

Background

Waikaraka Park is included in Schedule 14.1 of the Auckland Unitary Plan as a Category B Historic Heritage Place. The extent of the scheduled place encompasses the entire park and cemetery, with the acknowledgement of several exclusions from scheduling.¹ The park is also subject to archaeological controls, which relates to the cemetery in particular but applies to the entire park. No primary features have been formally identified², but the evaluation lists a number of heritage features, including the stone walls, old cemetery and soldiers' memorial, grandstand, ticket booth, toilet blocks from the 1930s and 1940s, a 1942 caretaker's cottage, and sports fields.³

The grandstand was built in 1938 by the Onehunga Borough Council as part of a wider programme of works to develop the reserve into a sports park, with cricket and football fields, a ticket booth, toilet blocks a caretaker's cottage and other improvements. The entire park was occupied by New Zealand and American military personnel during World War II. Before and after the war the grandstand supported the cricket season in the summer and rugby in winter. From 1967 onward the grandstand has been used for the Waikaraka Park stock cars speedway.

The grandstand was designed in a simple modern style using reinforced concrete and has sustained few alterations since construction. In 1986 remedial work was required to address issues with the concrete and to renew the support rooms under the grandstand.

While the grandstand is included as a feature of the scheduled reserve, its heritage values have been clarified by a supplemental assessment prepared in 2018.⁴ The assessment concluded that the grandstand itself had considerable historical, social, and context value, and a moderate level of physical attribute and aesthetic value.⁵ These values are affected in different ways by the options examined below.

¹ Schedule ID 1755, "Waikaraka Grounds and cemetery, including military cemetery." List of Exclusions: Post-1970s buildings; power pylons; buildings along Captain Springs Road on the street side of the 1930s park wall.

² D17 explains that identification of primary features for Category B places will be done over time, and that until they are identified it is considered that all features within the extent of place are considered primary features. (Explanations, page 2)

³ Sheldon, Katherine. Waikaraka Reserve Evaluation, prepared by the Auckland Council Heritage Unit 2013.

⁴ Matthews & Matthews. Waikaraka Park Grandstand Heritage Assessment. Prepared for Auckland Council February 2018.

⁵ Ibid.

Grandstand Issues

In October 2015, Auckland Council ordered a suspension of public use of the grandstand, after advice from seismic experts that without additional strengthening it posed a considerable safety risk. The Maungakiekie-Tamaki Local Board decided on 16 June 2016 that the grandstand should be condemned and demolished. Inspections had revealed that areas previously repaired were failing, and the building showed general age and materials deterioration.⁶

It is understood that the grandstand has been assessed as earthquake prone and that further concrete failure has been noted since closure. Further assessment of the composition of the reinforced concrete and underpinning of the structure is underway as well.

Since the structure has been closed, the stock car club that holds the site lease has accommodated spectators in temporary grandstands. It is unclear what the service need for grandstand seating will be in the long-term future of the park.

Commentary on Options

I have reviewed the summary of options being investigated for addressing the grandstand's issues.⁷ These are characterised as twelve options:

1. Do Nothing
2. Demolish without replacing
3. Demolish and reuse foundation slab (demountable seating)
4. Demolish and reuse foundation slab (permanent seating)
5. Demolish upper tier only and don't replace (or temporary upper tier)
6. Demolish the upper tier and replace with new lightweight upper tier
7. Refurbish with new top tier
8. Full Refurbishment of both tiers
9. Demolish and Replicate
10. Demolish and Replace
11. Relocate Service within Park
12. Relocate Service outside Park

I will address these options in order, commenting on the relative impact of each on the heritage values of the grandstand and wider scheduled park. My comments are generally based on an understanding of the objectives and policies of Chapter B5 (RPS-level) Chapter D17 (District Plan level) of the Auckland Unitary Plan (operative in part), namely the policies that address modifications, demolition, and seismic strengthening of Significant Historic Heritage.⁸ These comments are not comprehensive and do not take the place of a more detailed heritage impact assessment for the purposes of obtaining resource consent.

1. Do Nothing

While this option does not have an immediate effect on the heritage value of the place, leaving the grandstand to deteriorate further for ten years will ultimately have an adverse impact. It is likely that further deterioration will mean that less of the grandstand could be rehabilitated in the future. However, there is the possibility that during that time new methods for strengthening will become apparent, or that a compelling new use is found that justifies the costs of full rehabilitation.

⁶ ibid

⁷ Waikaraka Park Project draft options summary – 30 August 2018.

⁸ B5.2.2 (6), (7), (9) and D17.3(8), (9), (10), (14)

This option would only require resource consent under D17 as it relates to the establishment of new temporary seating structures within the scheduled extent of place. It is probably not an acceptable outcome from a perspective of public safety or park amenity or community leasing in any case.

2. Demolish without replacing

This option would result in the complete loss of the grandstand as a feature of the scheduled Waikaraka Park. This would be a significant adverse effect on the scheduled place and should be avoided if possible. Demolition of a primary feature of a Category B place is a discretionary activity and is strongly discouraged by D17.3(14). Council's Heritage staff would not be able to support it.

If the demolition of the grandstand is thought to be unavoidable, then measures to partly mitigate the loss of the grandstand would still need to be developed.

3. Demolish to slab with detachable lightweight seating

4. Demolish to slab with permanent lightweight seating

These options have similar impacts to option 2, though the impact to the wider park is somewhat mitigated by the retention of the slab, so that the original location and dimensions of the grandstand could at least be understood. It is preferable to option 2 but still not an option that could be supported by Heritage staff.

5. Demolish upper tier, don't replace (possible temporary upper tier)

6. Demolish upper tier, construct new lightweight upper tier

This partial demolition of the grandstand is understood to address a large share of the safety issues, which are associated with the upper tier. A crude estimate of the volume of the grandstand lost in this option is about 40-50%, which is considered partial demolition, still a discretionary activity under D17.

This option retains the location, dimensions, and some of the volume of the original grandstand, which makes it superior to options 2-4. However, it does completely alter the historical form of the grandstand, thereby diminishing its moderate physical attribute and aesthetic values. It would no longer be an intact grandstand from the first half of the 20th century and it would no longer express its substantial presence in the surrounding park. For these reasons the Heritage Staff would struggle to support this option, particularly if a superior option was possible.

7. Refurbish with new top tier

8. Full refurbishment of both tiers

Option 8 retains the most heritage fabric and therefore has the least effect on the heritage values of the place overall. It is conceivably possible that the entire refurbishment could be done under the permitted activity standard for repairs and maintenance, but it's more reasonable to assume that repair work would necessarily involve significant demolition of deteriorated fabric and would therefore require consent as modifications. It would nonetheless be supported. It is understood that the upper tier may be beyond repair, meaning it should be considered alongside option 7, which would reconstruct the top tier from new materials. Option 7 would involve the loss of the top tier, but is assumed to mean the new top tier closely resembles the original in form, materials, and overall design. This is the next best option from a heritage perspective, since it retains as much of the original fabric as possible.

9. Demolish and Replicate

This option makes no attempt to keep the original fabric of the grandstand (or keeps a minimal amount like the foundation slab) but reconstructs the entire grandstand. It would still require resource consent as a total demolition, with the mitigation being a complete reconstruction. While it would maintain a moderate degree physical attribute and aesthetic values, it would lose much of its historical and social value due to the complete loss of original fabric. It would no longer be a historical feature of the park. For these reasons it wouldn't be supported by Heritage staff.

10. Demolish and Replace

From a heritage perspective, this option is really no different from option 2, and would be considered a complete demolition with all the attendant consent issues that would entail.

11. Relocate Service within Park

12. Relocate Service outside Park

Since these options do nothing further with the existing grandstand it is considered equivalent to option 1 (do nothing) and shares all its attendant risks and opportunities.

Additional options

I consider that there is one other option worth considering, which was alluded to in the option assessment. An option that demolished half of the grandstand (perhaps leaving the foundation slab) and retained the other half with the aim of refurbishing the top and bottom tier (accepting that the top tier may need substantial reconstruction) should be investigated. This would enable the form and design to be appreciated, and a sense of its scale could still be appreciated to some degree. Mitigation could include marking out the full original dimensions of the grandstand on the ground and interpretive signage that would share historical information about the grandstand's original construction and design. Lightweight or temporary seating could be placed alongside the retained half, potentially using the original slab. Subject to its physical condition, the best half to retain would be the north half, so that the view from the Neilson street side of the park was less affected.

This option would be considered a partial demolition and therefore a discretionary activity under D17. But provided there was justification for the demolition and adequate mitigation in place to address the adverse impacts, this option could be supported by Heritage Staff if Options 8 or 7 are not feasible.

Notification

Resource consent for restricted discretionary activities (such as modification) are considered without public or limited notification under section D17.5, unless special circumstances exist. Options 7 or 8 are therefore unlikely to require public notification should resource consent be required. Any options involving demolition are subject to the standard tests for Notification under section 95A of the Resource Management Act. Since these options are likely to generate public interest and their impact on heritage will likely be more than minor, it is reasonable to assume for planning purposes that any resource consent required would be notified.

Mitigation

The options involving demolition would require measures that mitigate to some degree the adverse impact of losing part (or all) of the grandstand. While such mitigation does not always reduce the impact to a level that is less than significant, it is nonetheless important to do as much as possible to remedy and/or mitigate adverse effects which cannot be avoided.

Relevant mitigation for the grandstand would include on-site interpretation that would help park or speedway visitors understand the history of Waikaraka Park, the history of the grandstand, how it relates to other structures from the 1938 sports park project, and details on its original size, materials, design, and methods of construction. Additionally, prior to any demolition work the grandstand should be fully documented with measured drawings and archival photographs, with these materials placed in Council's archives. Greater loss of the original form and dimensions of the grandstand would also necessitate more ways to convey those details in the landscape, perhaps through the use of salvaged concrete to mark the original perimeter of the grandstand.

Justification

Any option involving partial or total demolition will need to be thoroughly justified by Council as the applicant, and not just on the relative cost compared to alternatives. A good guideline is to consider the matters contained in D17.3(14):

- (14) Avoid the total or substantial demolition or destruction of:
- (a) the primary features of Category A* and Category B scheduled historic heritage places;
 - (b) the non-primary features of Category A and A* scheduled historic heritage places; and contributing features within Historic Heritage Areas; unless:
 - (i) the demolition or destruction is required to allow for significant public benefit that could not otherwise be achieved; and
 - (ii) the significant public benefit outweighs the retention of the feature, or parts of the feature, or the place; or
 - (iii) the demolition or destruction is necessary to remove a significant amount of damaged heritage fabric to ensure the conservation of the scheduled historic heritage place.

References:

Auckland Unitary Plan (Operative in Part)

Section B5:

<http://unitaryplan.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Images/Auckland%20Unitary%20Plan%20Operative/Chapter%20B%20RPS/B5%20Built%20heritage%20and%20character.pdf>

Section D17:

<http://unitaryplan.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Images/Auckland%20Unitary%20Plan%20Operative/Chapter%20D%20Overlays/3.%20Built%20Heritage%20and%20Character/D17%20Historic%20Heritage%20Overlay.pdf>

Schedule 14.1 Historic Heritage Places

<http://unitaryplan.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Images/Auckland%20Unitary%20Plan%20Operative/Chapter%20L%20Schedules/Schedule%2014.1%20Schedule%20of%20Historic%20Heritage.pdf>

Matthews & Matthews. Waikaraka Park Grandstand Heritage Assessment. Prepared for Auckland Council February 2018.

Sheldon, Katherine. Waikaraka Reserve Evaluation, prepared by the Auckland Council Heritage Unit 2013.

Waikaraka Park Project draft options summary – 30 August 2018.