

Future of Hall Primary School Site Discussion Paper March 2014

Background

Against the wishes of the community, on 13 December 2006 the Hall Primary School was closed. The preschool remained open and fell under the administration of Gold Creek Primary School.

The Village of Hall & District Progress Association (VHDPA) immediately sought, and obtained agreement from the ACT Government for use of the Cottage, multi-purpose courts, garage (now the Men's Shed) and the Hall School Museum. The ACT Government did renovation work on the Cottage and this continues to be used for community meetings, church activities and also to run computer literacy programs. The tennis courts are in frequent use. The ACT Government also did work to upgrade the Pavilion. This was because the VHDPA did not want the 'community hub' model being developed at other closed school sites as the Pavilion was serving this purpose for Hall, but was in need of work. However, the amount invested in Hall to date has been small to date compared to other school sites (precise figures are not available however).

The Hall School Museum, under the VHDPA and stewardship of the Friends of Hall School Museum, has grown its collection and, with the informal agreement of the ACT Government, is using a number of other school buildings (see map) and is negotiating to use more buildings (which to date had been used as ad hoc storage space for the ACT Government). The Hall Men's Shed was formally registered in August 2011 with members participating in a range of activities from just enjoying a cuppa and discussions with other men to projects of a community nature. The Men's Shed occupies the old garage and is informally using the old school hall.

However, the tenure over the site for these activities, and other potential ideas community members have raised, remains uncertain.

The January 2011 Hall Primary School Master Plan was commissioned by the ACT Government by Eric Martin and Associates. This is available on the website (www.hall.act.au).

The key points in this report are:

- the heritage considerations for the heritage listed site and associated restrictions on redevelopment;
- the recommendation to remove all the demountable buildings from the site and replace the asbestos in remaining buildings with fibre cement sheet;
- the recommendation to move the preschool to classroom block 2; and
- possibilities for landscaping. (Note: The last tree assessment was undertaken in 2006 and there are community concerns around safety.)

The Government has not yet acted on this report.

The area covered by the Martin Report is Block 3 Section 6 Hall. It is zoned by the Territory Plan as a Community Facility and has a full heritage listing. The Fire Brigade have indicated they want to retain informal access to the adjacent green site to the Fire Shed. We will therefore assume this paper is only about the school site proper (4 acres – 1.62 hectares) – where the former school was located.

In October 2013, during the celebrations marking the opening of the Centenary Trail, the Chief Minister had a tour of the school site and talked with Association members about developing a long term solution for its future use. Since then, the Committee has continued discussions with Government officials. The VHDPA wants to open the discussion with the broader Hall and District community to ensure it continues to represent the community's aspirations for the site.

Some Key Issues

1. The Government would like to see some income generated from use of the site to cover maintenance costs. However:
 - a. The Government has not invested money in bringing buildings on the site up to standard (except the Cottage), and because the demountables may be destined to leave the site, is unlikely to invest in those buildings
 - b. The current community activities generate only small amounts of income
 - c. In spite of several requests over a number of years we do not know what kinds of costs are involved in maintaining the site
 - d. The government has also not initiated any development proposals to gain an income from the site.
2. Asbestos
An Asbestos Survey of Hall Primary School conducted in May 2004 identified asbestos in all buildings, particularly the demountable buildings. The recommendation was to leave, label and maintain and if any proposed building works was likely to disturb, then asbestos should be removed by a licensed asbestos removalist. The Martin report, 2011, recommends the demountables are removed and all asbestos be removed in the two permanent buildings and replaced with fibre cement sheet.
3. Preschool
The Government has indicated that the preschool will continue to operate and there are no plans to move the preschool. However as the preschool occupies a demountable building, in the long term a permanent preschool building will be needed.
4. Phased approach
Because of the high cost of developing new infrastructure and likely time lags, then a phased approach should be adopted that makes use of the existing buildings in the meantime. This phasing should include storage of items in temporary buildings while new ones are constructed to ensure continuity in community activities. The worst outcome would be for all the demountables to be removed and then a time lag while new buildings are constructed.

Overarching Principles

1. **Heritage**
Hall Primary School is included on the ACT Heritage Register as part of the Hall Village Heritage Precinct, which includes clear heritage guidelines. The Heritage Council recognises that changes of use often occur at heritage places, but will be concerned if the change of use results in changes to the fabric of the place that will cause detrimental heritage impacts. In addition to the original school building, the form and setting of the two permanent school buildings built in the 1960s are an integral part of the heritage listing.
2. **Whole-of- site**
In considering the balance of maintenance costs and revenue a whole of site approach should be adopted. In other words the users of each individual building should not be required to pay rent (but should pay outgoings), provided that there are a few buildings generating sufficient overall revenue to cover site maintenance. The other aspect of this principle is that the site should be managed as a whole for landscaping and heritage management.
3. **Tenure**
The preference (as per the second principle) is that the whole site remain under government control and is mostly managed by the community through a legal arrangement. Under this

arrangement, major maintenance would be undertaken by the ACT Government but minor maintenance would be undertaken by the Village of Hall and District Progress Association or its associated members. In addition, part of the site could be leased provided the whole site is managed as one for heritage and landscape purposes. Arrangements for the Preschool would remain under whatever the current lease arrangement is.

4. Community Use

The site should remain as a Community Facility. The priority for the use of the site should be for community benefit and use by community members.

5. Long term vision

Whatever is decided in the shorter term regarding the use of demountables should be compatible with the longer term vision for the site.

Community Demand

– **Hall and District Heritage Centre:** the Friends of the Museum, with a membership of 40 people largely from Hall and the District, have done an enormous amount of work in restoring the school building and collection. The Friends have staged a major exhibition each year since 2010 during the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival, with a second exhibition in 2013. Archival records and photographs are maintained on their website. Through media and relationships with Canberra Tourism, many hundreds of visitors have visited, both individuals and groups. The work has been maintained through a steady stream of grants from ACT Heritage and the Federal Government. Particularly important has been the relationship with the University of Canberra and the potential relationship regarding their curation and heritage studies and with the Australian Education Union to assist schools with the history component of the new national curriculum. Another significant relationship is with the National Library of Australia, which is funding an assessment of the national significance of the Museum and its collection.

Beyond the original school building, the Friends see the importance of maintaining the permanent school buildings built in the 1960s as part of the story of the heritage listed site. The more that is maintained of the school, the more of an understanding visitors can gain of school life through the generations. Beyond their enormous role in preserving and showcasing the history of the district, particularly around early schooling, the social aspects of the Friends Thursday meetings should also be acknowledged in bringing together otherwise somewhat isolated residents from Hall and Hall District around a common interest. The Hall School Museum is now associated with Museums Australia, the National Trust, the National Library, the Australian National Museum of Education and the Canberra and District Historical Society. With these associations the Museum is gaining a higher profile and a wider audience not just from the ACT but also nationally. This has been demonstrated by the increase in the number of group visits over the last two years. The Hall and District Heritage Centre has the potential to become a significant asset to the ACT; developed entirely through the efforts of volunteers.

– **The Men's Shed:** The Hall Men's Shed has been running for some years now and has over 30 members. The Shed is open on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and also Saturday mornings for those younger members who still work full time. Due to increase in the activities over the last two years it has needed additional working space. These activities have included building special workstations for autistic children and maintenance work for the equipment used by intellectually handicapped children. Its occupation on the school site has been of great benefit to the Museum as the members have carried out minor building works and furniture repairs. Mens Sheds have helped men throughout the country who suffer from isolation, depression or grief. The interaction with the other members of the shed at Hall has been of great benefit to

some members. Regularly, the members of the Hall Mens Shed and the Friends of the Hall Museum gather together on the site for communal events such as barbecues and morning teas.

- **The Rotary Club of Hall** have also indicated interest in a facility in Hall to store records , mobility scooters, mobile barbeque, books etc which are currently held in various locations. Besides consolidating its holdings, the location of the building on the school site would constitute a visible and clear association of the Club with the village community.
- The Hall Collector's Club has expressed a wish that, when the opportunity arises, that a space be devoted to them for a clubhouse. Early ideas, when the school was closed in 2006, included some form of arts centre or gallery for local artists. However, since 2007 there has been no evidence of community activity in this regard. There have also been intermittent requests for a children's gym area for the purposes of karate classes and Jitterbugs, an infant gymnastics class. Both of these are run commercially. A **multi-purpose community hall** (30 to 60 persons capacity) could be hired out to serve these needs as well as for small meetings and conferences. Until such a hall is constructed, these activities (and extra exhibition and working space for the museum) can be accommodated in three demountable buildings (marked 'community activities' on map).

All of these community demands can be accommodated on the site. In addition, the ACT Government has had discussions with Mr and Mrs Mason about using part of the site for a child care centre. Provided any development on the site is within the potential development zone (see map), and is in keeping with the overarching principles, such development would be welcome.

Short Term: Immediate priorities (2014)

- Community and ACT Government consultation to agree overarching principles and priorities for site
- Confirm long term arrangements for the preschool
- Develop and implement management plan for existing asbestos
- Community consultation on child care centre or other early learning activities
- Interim use of facilities agreed (see map) and formalised by an exchange of letters with the ACT Government
- Tree survey and any safety work completed

Medium Term (2015-2016)

- Construction of child care centre on the 'potential development zone' identified in the Eric Martin Report
- Removal of asbestos from permanent buildings
- Develop plans and budget for Heritage Centre, Men's Shed, Community Hall and Rotary Club facilities
- Develop landscape plan and budget for whole site
- Develop fundraising strategy and long term tenure arrangements with ACT Government
- Secure government funding in 2016-18 budgets

Longer Term (2017-2020 and beyond)

- Removal of demountables
- Implement landscape plan
- Construction of Heritage Centre, Men's Shed/ Rotary Club centre and Community Hall