

Sacred Heart Restoration Frequently Asked Questions



History

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE SACRED HEART BUILDING?

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd, an order of the Catholic Church, established and occupied the Abbotsford Convent site from 1863 to 1975. The Sisters provided accommodation, schooling and work for female orphans, Wards of the State and girls considered by the State and/or the Church to be in moral danger.

Dating back to 1868, the building known as Sacred Heart (or 'the home') was primarily used as a dormitory. The entire first floor was used to accommodate up to 400 women, many of whom worked in the adjoining Laundries without pay and in oppressive conditions. The second floor housed 'the granary' which was used for sewing and mending damaged laundry. The south-east corner contained the former infirmary (hospital), which comprised a dormitory upstairs, treatment rooms downstairs and a kitchen at its southern end. The infirmary is outside the scope of this restoration.

Most of the Sacred Heart building has been unoccupied since the 1970s, when the Sisters of the Good Shepherd sold the Convent site.

LaTrobe University occupied the site from the late 1980s until 1997, at which point Australand, a major property developer, won the tender to purchase the land, prompting an unprecedented community campaign to save the Abbotsford Convent site from commercial development. After years of community campaigning, led by the Abbotsford Convent Coalition, the State Government of Victoria announced in 2004 that the not-for-profit Abbotsford Convent Foundation (ACF) would be granted ownership and management of the Abbotsford Convent on behalf of the public.

Since that time, the ACF has worked towards its vision of restoring all buildings at the Abbotsford Convent in line with its remit of creating an exemplary arts, cultural and learning precinct. As one of the biggest and most dilapidated buildings on the Convent site, the Sacred Heart restoration marks an important milestone in the ACF's custodianship of the Convent.

The redevelopment of the Sacred Heart building adds significant opportunities to grow and enhance the Convent-based artistic and creative community, as well as the Convent's event offerings and visitor opportunities. This marks an exciting new chapter in the history of the Sacred Heart building, whilst acknowledging the sad heritage of this building and the impact it had on the lives of the women and girls who resided here.

As custodians of the Convent site today, the ACF acknowledges the experiences of the women and girls who lived and worked onsite with The Sisters of the Good Shepherd, many of whom experienced regimented and oppressive conditions. The ACF is currently working on a heritage interpretation project to acknowledge this history.

The ACF also recognises the Wurundjeri People as the traditional custodians of the land and water on which we work and live.

Background

WHY IS THE SACRED HEART BUILDING BEING RESTORED?

Since the government transferred ownership of the Convent site to the ACF in 2004, the ACF has undertaken the significant task of restoring the site's buildings, many of which were dilapidated and unable to be used.

As one of the largest buildings, work on the Sacred Heart building was not possible without raising the significant funds required to restore it. Over the last 13 years the ACF has undertaken restoration projects progressively. This approach has enabled the ACF to generate income through tenancies, venue hire and events, which could then be invested into the restoration of bigger buildings over time.

In May 2015 the ACF received a challenge grant of \$2.681 million from the Federal Government to restore the 3,200m² Sacred Heart building. This significant support through the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development's National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF) matched an extremely generous donation of \$2 million from the Dara Foundation, as well as funds raised by the ACF over the past decade.

This combined funding means that the Sacred Heart building can now be restored, protecting the building as a culturally and historically significant national landmark for use by generations to come. It will also support the sustainability of the Convent and its growth as Australia's largest multi-arts precinct.

Vision

WHAT WILL THE BUILDING BE USED FOR?

The Sacred Heart building will become a multi-arts and creative space operating for artistic, cultural, business and public use. It is envisaged that it may include: artistic and creative tenants, organisations and businesses; venue hire, workshop, learning, exhibition and performance spaces; and bespoke atelier retail spaces showcasing the work of local artists and creative practitioners including tenants.

However, given the many and varied opportunities presented by the building's size and layout – covering 3,200m² on multiple floors – the ACF will assess and determine the uses of the space once Expressions of Interest (EoIs) by prospective tenants have been sought. The ACF expects to call for EoIs in June/July 2017, and will encourage creative ideas for the use of the building, in keeping with the Convent's arts, cultural and learning focus.

Long term it is envisaged that this space will evolve, always reflecting Melbourne's arts, cultural and creative community.

Restoration Process and Procedures

WHEN WILL THE BUILDING RESTORATION COMMENCE AND FINISH?

The restoration work commenced in July 2017, and is expected to be completed in late 2017 / early 2018. It is envisaged that the Sacred Heart building will be operational and open for business in January 2018. There may be minor fit-out works in the interior of the building based on tenants' needs once the building is operational. However, as with any building project, timelines may change due to extraneous factors, such as weather. The ACF will keep tenants, visitors and venue hirers updated via the [ACF website](#) and monthly [e-news](#).

WHAT DOES THE RESTORATION ENTAIL?

The Sacred Heart building is currently being restored to protect the building and to make it safe, secure and functional in line with occupational health and safety requirements so that it is once again operational. In order to achieve this, work includes repairing and/or replacing flooring, bathrooms and ceilings etc. Work will also be undertaken to ensure the building is acoustically sound.

As with all restorations of Convent buildings, Sacred Heart will be restored in line with federal Universal Access requirements, and therefore two lifts will be installed, along with a bridge connecting one part of the building to another, making the building accessibility-compliant. No major structural changes will be made to the building's internal infrastructure.

WILL THE RESTORATION OF THE BUILDING BE HERITAGE-LISTING COMPLIANT?

All building works at the Convent are subject to statutory approval from Heritage Victoria, including the Sacred Heart building.

As with all Convent building restoration work, the ACF will make every effort to retain the original features of the Sacred Heart building where possible, and has ensured that the architect and building firm appointed for this project are experts in heritage restoration.

The ACF has also submitted an application to the Federal Government for the entire Abbotsford Convent precinct, including the Sacred Heart building, to be registered on the National Heritage List. A decision is expected to be made within the next 12 months.

Melbourne-based architect firm Kerstin Thompson Architects (KTA), which has considerable experience in heritage architecture, has led the design of the restoration. The restoration will be undertaken by FDC builders.

WHO IS FUNDING THE PROJECT?

The ACF has secured a total of \$5.363 million to make the restoration of the Sacred Heart building possible. This funding includes a Federal Government challenge grant of \$2.681 million from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development's National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF), which matched an extremely generous donation of \$2 million from the Dara Foundation. Remaining funds were raised by the ACF over the past decade.

Whilst generous and critical government, philanthropic and public funding has combined to make this restoration possible in order to make the building functional, safe and operational, further funding will be required to refurbish the former infirmary in the south-east corner of the Sacred Heart building, which is outside the scope of this restoration. Therefore, the ACF will continue to raise funds for the Abbotsford Convent precincts' ongoing restoration needs into the future.

Restoration Impact

WHAT IMPACT WILL THE RESTORATION WORKS HAVE ONSITE?

The ACF will adopt a low-impact approach to minimise impact to the Convent site and its community.

The Convent is a pedestrianised site, and every effort will be made to minimise construction vehicles onsite during normal business hours by:

- Restricting the majority of construction vehicle access to the Sacred Heart building to between 7 – 8am via Gate One (main entrance). Gate One bollards will close at 8am each day as usual, where possible.
- Restricting essential vehicle access only to Gate Two during normal business hours.

At this stage, the ACF does not foresee a notable impact on the Convent's public car park. This is because:

- The vast majority of building restoration work is expected to take place on weekdays, not on weekends when the car park is usually busier
- For the majority of the restoration, the ACF does not anticipate there being great numbers of building workers onsite at any one time
- Provision has been made for a limited allocation of vehicles needing access to the Sacred Heart building to park near the building as opposed to in the public carpark.

From a noise perspective, it is envisaged that only buildings directly next to the Sacred Heart building will experience noise impact.

Given the Sacred Heart courtyard's proximity to the adjoining Sacred Heart building, access to the courtyard will be closed during the restoration due to occupational health and safety regulations.

Overall, the majority of the Convent site, including the Convent building, will operate to 'business as usual' during the Sacred Heart restoration.

HOW WILL TENANTS BE IMPACTED?

The impact on the Convent-based tenant community largely depends on which building they are located in. The ACF will work with the builders, FDC, to manage communications and updates for tenants in the buildings surrounding Sacred Heart to keep them informed about project works with a potential noise-impact. More details will be available once the construction schedule has been finalised.

HOW WILL VENUE HIRERS BE IMPACTED?

Venue hire will continue with minimal impact during the Sacred Heart restoration.

All spaces in the Convent building, including the Community and Linen rooms, will continue to be available, with no impact.

The following venue hire spaces in the Rosina building will remain available: the Yellow Room, Dorm One and the Rosina Auditorium. Bursaria Fine Foods will continue to operate as usual, with full use of the Rosina Function Space & courtyard.

Three venue hire spaces within and adjoining Sacred Heart will close from late June 2017 for the restoration – the Ironing Room, the Little Ironing Room and the Oratory. The ACF venue hire team is here to help accommodate those wishing to hire these spaces in alternative spaces, including the Auditorium and Dorm One for performances and rehearsals.

HOW WILL RESIDENTS BE IMPACTED?

It is envisaged that the impact on local residents and neighbours will be minimal. The majority of building work will be undertaken between 7am – 4pm on weekdays, which may see a slight increase in traffic to the Convent during these times. Otherwise it is not anticipated that noise will reach neighbouring streets.

HOW WILL VISITORS BE IMPACTED?

Overall the Convent will continue to operate as ‘business as usual’ during the Sacred Heart restoration, and therefore impact to visitors should be minimal. Access to the Sacred Heart courtyard will be closed for health and safety purposes, but all other areas, including the Convent’s gardens and eateries, will operate as usual. As mentioned above, impact on the car park is expected to be minimal.

ONCE THE BUILDING IS FINISHED, WILL IT BE OPEN TO VISITORS?

Although the exact uses of the Sacred Heart building will not be determined until Eols have been received from artistic and creative communities and businesses, the ACF envisages that parts of the ground floor may be activated for visitor engagement. This could be via a retail outlet showcasing the work of creative practitioners, or via performance spaces for audiences to attend. The ACF also envisages that the Sacred Heart building will have spaces that may be booked for venue hire. As with all ACF developments, the intention is to accommodate tenant, business and visitor needs.

Tenancy, Venue Hire And Visitor Use

HAVE ANY TENANCY ARRANGEMENTS BEEN MADE?

In February 2016, the ACF sought Registrations of Interest from arts and cultural practitioners and creative businesses interested in applying for spaces in the Sacred Heart building. This was the first step in assisting the ACF and the architects to map building needs and considerations. However, no tenancy agreements have been made. The ACF expects to call for Eols for tenancy and other uses in from August 2017.

I’M AN ARTIST, CREATIVE OR CULTURAL PRACTITIONER OR ORGANISATION – HOW DO I APPLY FOR A SPACE IN THE SACRED HEART BUILDING?

Prospective artistic and creative individuals, groups, organisations and businesses will be invited via a publically-accessible open invitation to submit Eols for tenancy and other uses of the Sacred Heart space in August 2017.

Existing Convent tenants interested in moving to the Sacred Heart building will need to submit an Eol.

It is envisaged that spaces will range in size from 20 to 230m² (with the ground floor comprising smaller spaces, and the upper floors comprising larger spaces), offering diverse opportunities for uses – from arts, cultural and creative organisations, to individual arts and cultural practitioners and retailers. Lease terms and durations will be negotiated with successful applicants.

Updates will be provided via the Convent’s e-news and [website](#).

Contacts And Keeping Up To Date

To keep up-to-date on Sacred Heart restoration works, please sign up to the ACF's monthly e-news, [The Humbug](#).

To keep abreast of tenancy and EoI notifications, please sign up to the ACF's [tenancy register](#). Please be sure to note your interest in Sacred Heart tenancy when filling in this form.

For venue hire information, please contact the ACF's Venue Hire team: venuehire@abbotsfordconvent.com.au.