

REPORTERS



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Council endorse plan for future of Tomaree Lodge

By Lindsay HALL

AFTER a long period of uncertainty, it seems that a new future is on the horizon for Tomaree Lodge.

The heritage listed site is located at the base of Mount Tomaree, at the Tomaree headlands.

The land has a significant history in the region, having been widely used for foraging and food gathering by the Indigenous Woromi people prior to colonisation by the British.

In 1942 it was determined to be a site of strategic significance and a military

base was established for the defence of the Hunter region.

From 1947 it was repurposed to operate as a psychiatric hospital, and was utilised for this or similar purposes for most of its use until 2021.

Its most recent use was to provide accommodation for individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities.

This began in 2006, but ceased in April 2021.

Since that time, with the exception of a privately operated oyster hatchery on the grounds, Tomaree Lodge has been unused by the government or the

community, though the maintenance costs have continued at a rate of close to \$1 million annually.

At the most recent meeting of Port Stephens Council it was acknowledged that the State Government has made a commitment to reserve the Tomaree Lodge site for community use, and have invited submission from interested parties to make a decision about any future development or repurposing.

The Tomaree Headland Heritage Group (THHG) have been heavily involved in conversations regarding Tomaree Lodge since it ceased

providing accommodation in 2021.

In the interests of finding the best possible use for the community of Port Stephens, the THHG commissioned a Strategic Concept Plan that could be used to educate on the potential uses for the site and its facilities, bearing in mind the need for ongoing maintenance costs.

Appearing before Council as a representative of THHG, Frank Future said of the group's findings, "The Port Stephens community clearly doesn't have a vision for major development at this site.

"It needs to be repurposed."

Echoing the sentiments made by the State Government about protecting the history and heritage for the sake of community, Mr Future said, "It's become very clear to us that the Tomaree Lodge site must always be accessible to the public."

Port Stephens Council voted unanimously to voice their support for the State Government plan to find a purpose of Tomaree Lodge that would leave it open to residents of Port Stephens.

Council also resolved to explore options for

management of the site that could involve partnership with the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group or other community groups or interested parties on the provision that any such options would not negatively impact the local Council budget.

While certainly not a declaration that Port Stephens Council would like to step into a role of management or administration over Tomaree Lodge, they are resolved to be an active participant in the planning process moving forward.