



By Badan Warisan Malaysia

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[BADAN Warisan Malaysia](#) has for the past several years been advocating against the demolition of [Pudu Jail](#). We have been led to understand that a small concession has been made to preserve a small section of the wall flanking the main gate, although we do not have any details about this particular plan. This token concession makes a mockery of heritage preservation.

We wonder if a few years down the road, this may also be demolished to make way for further development. Or will it, like the remnants of the old railway arches on Lebuhr Pasar Besar, be left standing, ignored, with no explanation of its origins or why it is even there, and to suffer the

same travesty of being garishly painted, as it passes out of the local community's memories?

The excuse that heritage enclaves or properties have to provide the same economic viability viz-a-viz new development in adjacent areas is surely passé. Everywhere else in the world, communities are striving to retain their heritage structures as physical, tangible evidence of their history and identity.

Would this decision to demolish have been made were the building to have been the [Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad](#)

? Both these buildings were built at the same time, and the design credited to the same engineer,

[C E Spooner](#)

. And yet one is retained, despite having had extensive changes made to its interior, while the other has largely retained its original form. If the decision to retain or demolish one or the other was based on which has the higher levels of authenticity, Pudu Jail would come out on top. Unfortunately, Pudu Jail does not have the wow factor. It does not have the wholesome appeal, being a building with a brutal and insalubrious story. But is this not a legitimate part of Kuala Lumpur's story?

The latest news which we have read is that it appears the government does not consider [Pudu Jail](#)

to be a heritage building, and that it is not something which, as a nation, we are proud of.

It would be useful to know what criteria a building or site needs to possess before our government will consider it a heritage building. In the case of Pudu Jail, is it not heritage just because it is a jail, with all its negative connotations?

Surely jails are a part of the tangible evidence of our penal history which is part of our justice system. I think that we should also not forget that in its over 100-year history, it was not only a prison where convicts were incarcerated. It was also where, during the Japanese occupation, service officers from many different nations who had fought to defend our shores were also imprisoned. Is this a part of our nation's history which we are also not proud of?

Traffic congestion

Sadly, the custodians of our nation's heritage have not seen fit to respond to the many different voices which have spoken up against Pudu Jail's demolition. The only official comments have been ones justifying the need for road expansion to alleviate traffic congestion.

But traffic congestion is not something which those of us who live and work in Kuala Lumpur are unfamiliar with. Would these same authorities be so quick to agree to demolish the old Railway Station so that we can widen Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin and help ease traffic? Or the [Central Market](#) building? It would be very surprising if the city's traffic woes just disappeared with the widening of Jalan Pudu or Jalan Hang Jebat.

Badan Warisan Malaysia has highlighted Pudu Jail's plight in various correspondences with the authorities and via letters to the press for the past decade. We have also formally advocated against its proposed demolition, along with many, many other properties in Kuala Lumpur via our commentary and recommendations for the [KL Structure Plan](#) and more recently, the [Draft KL Local Plan](#).

While it may be too late to save Pudu Jail, Badan Warisan hopes that the awareness raised by this will strengthen the public's resolve to be conscious of how fragile our heritage is and to speak up for its protection, conservation and preservation.

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