

## **RECOVERY OF BLOCK 4 AT THE CENTRAL POLICE STATION COMPOUND**

### **PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members of the Antiquities Advisory Board of the recovery work for the Married Inspectors' Quarters (i.e. Block 4) at the Central Police Station (CPS) Compound, following its partial collapse on 29 May 2016.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. Block 4 was built as a domestic building between 1862 and 1864 and used as Married Inspectors' Quarters. It formed part of the first major phase of construction at the CPS Compound.
3. At the inception of the current revitalisation work, commenced in 2012, Block 4 was largely intact when compared with the schematic drawings except for the servants' wing, which had been demolished and later replaced by a garage built in 1927.
4. A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was prepared and published by Purcell Miller Tritton LLP, a consultant of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC), in June 2008<sup>1</sup>. The CMP contained a number of conservation policies related to the building (referred to as "Dormitory Blocks A and B" in the CMP); those with particular relevance to the current issues are reproduced below:

*6.2.6.1 The external appearance of these buildings should be retained unaltered except for the replacement of modern windows and removal of accretions such as the air-conditioning units.*

Reason for this policy: These buildings are both early buildings on the site which remain relatively unaltered. They make a highly significant

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<sup>1</sup> *The Old Central Police Station and Victoria Prison, Hong Kong* Conservation Management Plan June 2008 by Purcell Miller Tritton LLP

contribution to both the surrounding streetscape and the setting of the parade ground.

*6.2.6.3 The interiors of these buildings should be kept intact as much as possible and the existing internal fittings and finishes should be respected except where obvious modern interventions should be removed.*

Reason for this policy: The interiors survive to a considerable degree and every effort should be made when finding new uses for these buildings to keep as much as possible of the internal fixtures' finishes and fittings.

*6.2.6.4 The layout of these buildings should be respected with their separate access stairs and the disposition of the rooms.*

Reason for this policy: The layout of these buildings survives to a great extent and it is indicative of the original purpose as units of accommodation of different standards for various levels of police officers. The layout of the rooms and stairs is an all-important way of understanding the buildings and the layout should be respected when any repair and reordering takes place to suit new uses.

*6.2.6.5 The granite walls, revetments and corbels at basement level of the north wing should be carefully conserved as examples of the earliest guard house and enclosure of the prison.*

Reason for this policy: The walls that have been incorporated into the lower floor of the north wing are the remains of the external wall of the early prison compound and of the guard house that was on the corner of the prison. As such these walls are significant historic survivals.

5. The CMP describes the building as being of high significance, and notes that the granite revetment walls on which the building is founded were originally the perimeter walls of the compound prior to the expansion of the site further north as far as Hollywood Road.

6. Following the publication of the CMP, a scheme of revitalisation was developed for this building and the whole CPS site, which was based on the

notion of a heritage-led adaptive reuse of 16 of the existing buildings (three other structures including the garage were removed as these were judged to be intrusive). The underlying principles that informed the policy recommendations of the CMP were, and remain, that:

- *The best way to conserve a building is to use it;*
- *The building should inform the new use, not the business plan;*
- *Change should be managed sensitively.*

## **Renovation works**

7. Before the renovation works, Block 4 was surveyed as part of a site-wide review of condition by Purcell (conservation architects) and by Arup (structural engineers), at various times during the period from 2009 to 2011. The surveys noted a variety of defects in Block 4, including cracks in the brickwork walls and termite infestation in some of the floor timbers. The brickwork superstructure of Block 4 was constructed using grey (sometimes referred to as “green”) bricks bedded in lime mortar.

8. Renovation works on Block 4 aimed at dealing with the defects discovered along with making changes to meet statutory requirements for means of escape, lavatory provision, the provision of barrier free access, guarding of balconies and stairs, and improvement of the fire resistance of floors. The last of these upgrades was the single largest intervention in the superstructure of the building.

9. During construction, more defects were revealed upon removal of internal and external finishes for works to be carried out. These showed that in some areas, notably the roof eaves, the condition of brickwork was poor to very poor; a selected number of brickwork piers were also found to be in poor condition. These areas were rebuilt using salvaged bricks where they were sound, or replaced with new bricks.

10. At the time of the partial collapse, three-quarters of the planned renovation works were completed. The following is a summary of the works remaining at that date:

- Some timber floor upgrades

- Casting of new concrete slabs at ground floor
- Ceiling repairs
- Render repairs internally and externally
- Decorations
- Staircase upgrade works
- East elevation brick pier repairs
- Completion of look out (bay window) beam installation and reinstatement works
- Verandah guarding
- Metal ceiling grids and ventilation and air-conditioning works
- Mechanical, electrical and plumbing works

11. The particular vulnerabilities of Block 4 were: its domestic scale and the use of timber floors and stairs; the physical impact arising from potential increased use; and the associated interventions arising from compliance with fire safety and other regulatory requirements. For these reasons, the upper floors were planned to be used as offices; the ground floor was intended to be used for retail. The intention of these decisions was to apply modest impacts on the building and to mitigate the statutory compliance demands that would otherwise have imposed substantial changes relating to guarding of stairs and balconies – both being key features of the building and important Character Defining Elements.

### **Works after partial collapse**

12. The partial collapse on 29 May 2016 resulted in the loss of the north-west corner of Block 4, measuring 8m by 10m. Vertically, the loss extended from roof level down to the top of the granite revetment walls. The associated floor structures at first and second floor levels were also lost. After the incident, work has been done to ensure the stability of Block 4, comprising removal of the damaged part of the south wall; removal and sorting of debris; salvage of re-usable materials including bricks and stones, metalwork and timber elements; making safe of the exposed roof structure; erection of propping, horizontal ties and scaffolding. Next steps include: a thorough reassessment of the structural integrity of Block 4; and the erection of protective work above the Pottinger Ramp to facilitate safe access to the site whilst the recovery work is carried out.

## **INDEPENDENT REVIEW**

13. Following the partial collapse, the Board of Stewards of HKJC has set up an Independent Review Panel (Panel) comprising three structural engineers, two from Hong Kong and one from Australia, to enquire into the incident. The Panel will enquire into the facts and circumstances that led to the partial collapse of Block 4 and report on the likely causes of the partial collapse and whether any additional measures should reasonably or practically have been taken to prevent the collapse.

14. As part of its enquiry, the Panel will look into relevant information, including the submissions made by the Authorised Person and Registered Structural Engineer to the Buildings Department. They will also conduct interviews with relevant parties and examine physical materials, as appropriate. Subject to its review of facts and the issues encountered, the Panel aims to submit its findings to HKJC's Board of Stewards in a few months. HKJC will share the results with the Government and the public. It is expected that the findings and recommendations of the Panel can be used for reference in finalising the plan for recovering the partially collapsed Block 4.

## **RECOVERY OPTIONS**

15. In parallel with the stabilisation works and the independent review, preparatory work for drawing up a recovery plan for Block 4 has commenced. Several rounds of discussion have taken place since June 2016 involving project staff, consultants and contractors. A broad range of possible approaches to the building in its current condition were considered, taking reference from international heritage practice. Several options were put forward as the starting point for further consideration, with no preference given to any of these options. Representatives of the Commissioner for Heritage's Office of the Development Bureau, Buildings Department, and the Antiquities and Monuments Office were consulted in the process.

16. The options that were put forward, in no particular order, are:

- A. Restoration of the lost parts by using original materials: Restore the collapsed parts of the building by using salvaged or traditional materials, if feasible, and use the building for adaptive reuse.

- B. Reconstruction of the lost parts by using modern materials: Reconstruct the collapsed parts of the building by using modern materials and use the building for adaptive reuse.
- C. Partial demolition with modern intervention: Demolish part of the building to increase safety factor and build a modern structure for adaptive reuse.
- D. Partial demolition with reuse: Reconstruct the collapsed part of the building into a courtyard, and keep the remaining standing parts of the building for adaptive reuse.
- E. Partial demolition with façade retention: Demolish part of the building as necessary to increase safety factor, reconstruct the façade, and keep the building as a monument, with no intended reuse of the building.
- F. Façade and interior retention: Retain the façade and interior partitions of the building, and keep the building as a monument, with no intended reuse of the building.
- G. Reconstruction: Demolish the remaining standing parts of the building and construct a new building with the original appearance and layout on the site for adaptive reuse.
- H. Demolition of the building: Demolish the remaining standing parts of the building and create an open courtyard on the site.

17. It is acknowledged that the practicability of these options will be dependent on their engineering feasibility including, for example, whether the building is safe for further work to be conducted and whether it is feasible to reuse any of the salvaged or traditional materials for the works. It is also envisaged that a varying degree of structural strengthening work will be required for some of these options. The further development of the recovery options into detailed recovery proposals will therefore be informed by engineering input and findings of the Panel.

18. The recovery options outlined above will, inevitably, and to varying degrees, result in some loss to the heritage value of Block 4. A key question to

ask in the development of the recovery options into recovery proposals is whether they can retain the remaining heritage value of Block 4 or, in other words, minimise the loss of its heritage value. Subject to the engineering input and the independent review, some of the options that allow adaptive reuse of Block 4 may present the opportunity to reuse a part of it as a heritage hub (i.e. as against the use of part of the building for retail as originally planned), hence adding new community and social values that contribute to the building's heritage significance and thus compensate for the loss of heritage value due to the partial collapse.

19. HKJC is fully committed to delivering the CPS Compound revitalisation project. Although the impacts of the recovery options on cost and on the time to complete the project are noted, these are not regarded as determining factors to be taken into account in the final decision about which option is to be selected.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

20. Block 4 is a historically and contextually significant building and a key component of the CPS Compound; it is also close by to the principal entrance to the site from Hollywood Road and it makes an important contribution to the streetscape of Arbuthnot Road. The impacts of the partial collapse are significant for Block 4 and for the CPS Compound.

21. Work on the development for the recovery options is ongoing, and arrangements are being made for protective works to be installed around Block 4 so that works on other buildings may continue unabated while detailed planning for the recovery of Block 4 is underway.

22. Considerable further work is required in order to arrive at definitive recovery proposals for Block 4, and it is anticipated that a second presentation to the Antiquities Advisory Board will be necessary in due course. The final proposal will be approved by the Antiquities Authority for implementation. In the interim, the Antiquities Advisory Board's comments, advice and questions are welcome and will be taken into consideration in the development process.