

Frequently Asked Questions on
Assessment of Buildings in Hong Kong which May Have Heritage Value

Q1: How were the buildings identified and assessed?

A1: A territory-wide survey on the buildings in Hong Kong mainly built before 1950 was carried out by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) from 1996-2000. Some 8,800 buildings were recorded. A more in-depth survey of 1,444 buildings with higher heritage value selected from the 8,800 surveyed buildings was carried out by AMO in 2002-2004.

As recommended by Members of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB), an independent Historic Buildings Assessment Panel (Assessment Panel) comprising historians and members of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, Hong Kong Institute of Planners and Hong Kong Institution of Engineers has been formed since March 2005 to undertake an in-depth assessment of the heritage value of these 1,444 historic buildings.

After announcement of the results of the assessment, together with the proposed grading (Proposed Grade 1/ 2/ 3 or No Grading) of the 1,444 historic buildings on 19 March 2009, a public consultation was conducted until 31 July 2009. During the public consultation period and thereafter, AMO has been receiving suggestions by the public to include new items for assessment of their heritage value and consideration of the need for grading.

As per the prevailing practice, the heritage value of historic buildings is first assessed by the Assessment Panel against six criteria, namely historical interest, architectural merit, group value, social value and local interest, authenticity and rarity (<https://www.aab.gov.hk/filemanager/aab/common/faq/AAB-SM-B.pdf>). The Assessment Panel will then recommend proposed grading to AAB for consideration. AAB will, after discussion and deliberation against the aforesaid assessment criteria, consider endorsing the proposed grading in open meetings. Subject to AAB's views, AMO will upload the proposed grading of the respective items and the information on their heritage value to AAB's website for a one-month public consultation. Such information can be viewed by the public through AAB's website. AMO will report to AAB the views received during the consultation period for further consideration before finalising their grading (Grade 1/ 2/ 3 or No Grading) against the assessment criteria in the meetings.

Q2: How can members of the public participate in the grading exercise?

A2: Apart from the 1,444 historic buildings, members of the public are welcome to suggest new items which may have heritage value by informing AMO vide

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Tsim Sha Tsui
Kowloon, Hong Kong
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Enquiries: 2208 4400
Fax: 2377 9792

When suggesting new items, members of the public should provide information, including but not limited to location plans, photos and historical information. AMO will then consider the suitability of including them in the “List of new items for grading assessment” against the six assessment criteria (refer to A1) for further research and grading assessment.

As per the prevailing practice, AAB will assess the heritage value of the new items in open meetings (refer to A1 for details). Members of the public can observe the meetings by complying with the “Guidelines and Rules for Observation of Meeting” at the link: <https://www.aab.gov.hk/en/meetings/guidelines-and-rules-for-observation-of-meeting/index.html>.

During the one-month public consultation (refer to A1 for details) held after the proposed grading of items is endorsed by AAB, members of the public may express their views on the proposed grading of the new items concerned and/or provide additional information on their heritage value, if any, by writing to AMO vide mail, email or fax. AMO will report to AAB the views received during the consultation period for further consideration before finalising their grading in open meetings.

Q3: Have the evaluation system and the selection principles been drawn up based on international practices?

A3: The evaluation system and the selection principles for historic buildings are derived from the systems and principles adopted in places outside Hong Kong, as well as the established international documents on heritage conservation, including *Venice Charter* (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments

and Sites), *Burra Charter* (The Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance), and *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* (China ICOMOS). The unique situation of Hong Kong has also been a crucial factor taken into consideration.

Q4: How do I know details of the assessment result? What if I wish to express my views on the assessment of my building and/or provide additional information on it?

A4: The assessment results, together with the proposed grading, are uploaded onto the website of AAB which can be viewed by the public via the links:

https://www.aab.gov.hk/filemanager/aab/en/content_29/AAB-SM-chi.pdf

(1,444 historic buildings) and

https://www.aab.gov.hk/filemanager/aab/en/content_29/list_new_items_assessed.pdf

(new items in addition to 1,444 buildings).

To facilitate a deeper understanding of the heritage value of the items for grading assessment, it would be most appreciated if access to your building by AMO could be granted and relevant historical documents reflecting the history and heritage values of your building against the assessment criteria (refer to A1) could be provided to AMO; for example, when the building was built and by whom, how was it used, the significant events taken place there, the historical figures associated with it, the alterations and repairs of the building carried out etc.

All the relevant information of your building, including your views and comments will be conveyed to the Assessment Panel and AAB by AMO for their consideration in assessing your building.

Q5: Could I know what reference materials/ information about the building have been considered by the Assessment Panel in the assessment of the heritage value of the building?

A5: In the assessment of historic buildings, we have made reference to a number of archives and publications from different sources. Copies of some of these reference materials are now kept in AMO. If you wish to view them, you are welcome to visit our Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre at Kowloon Park, Tsim Sha Tsui. Please call 2208 4428 to make an appointment.

The information considered by the Assessment Panel is the factual account of the heritage value of the buildings studied. In the light of the huge volume of materials considered, we have provided extracts of the information online through the “One Stop Search for Information on Individual Buildings” on AAB’s website at the link: <https://www.aab.gov.hk/en/historic-buildings/search-for-information-on-individual-buildings/index.html>.

Q6: Would the grading jeopardize my ownership of the building?

A6: The grading system is administrative in nature, providing an objective basis for determining the heritage value, and hence the preservation need, of the historic buildings. The grading does not affect the ownership, management, usage and development rights of the buildings.

Q7: Would the grading of my property have any implication/ restrictions on any proposed alteration/ renovations to be conducted?

A7: The grading system is administrative in nature, providing an objective basis for determining the heritage value, and hence the preservation need, of the historic buildings. The grading does not affect their ownership, management, usage and development rights of the buildings.

The grading of the building *per se* will not put the building under statutory protection under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53) (“the Ordinance”). However, the Authority (i.e. the Secretary for Development) will actively consider whether a building in the pool of Grade 1 buildings has reached the high threshold of “monument” for the purpose of declaration of “monument” under the Ordinance, and may take action for “proposed monument” declaration under the Ordinance if the building needs immediate statutory protection (e.g. if the building is under threat of demolition or alteration/ renovation works are proposed to be carried out which may affect the heritage value of the building). Should the Authority declare the building to be a “monument” as defined in the Ordinance (e.g. by way of declaring the building to be a historical building under section 3 of the Ordinance) or a “proposed monument” as defined in the Ordinance (e.g. by way of declaring the building to be a proposed historical building under section 2A of the Ordinance), the relevant protection mechanism under the Ordinance will apply, for example, the prohibition on building/ demolition works and other works unless a permit is granted by the Authority under section 6 of the Ordinance.

The Government has established an internal mechanism to monitor any plan to demolish or alter declared monuments, proposed monuments, graded buildings or buildings proposed to be graded and this internal mechanism also monitors privately-owned graded historic buildings. Under the internal monitoring mechanism, the Buildings Department, Lands Department and Planning Department will notify the Commissioner for Heritage's Office ("CHO") and Antiquities and Monuments Office ("AMO") of the Development Bureau any possible threat which may affect the graded historic buildings that have been brought to the departments' attention through applications submitted by the private owners. CHO and AMO will take timely follow-up actions with the private owners concerned, e.g., approaching them to explore conservation options aiming to strike a balance between preservation of historic buildings and respect for private property rights. Besides, AMO will offer technical advice from the heritage conservation perspective in relation to the proposed works.

Q8: What are the measures and incentives undertaken by the Government to protect privately owned graded historic buildings?

A8: A number of administrative measures and economic incentives have been undertaken by Government to implement the heritage conservation policy.

The Government's heritage conservation policy aims to strike a proper balance between respect for private property rights and heritage conservation. Depending on individual circumstances, appropriate economic incentives may be considered on a case-by-case basis to encourage private owners to conserve and revitalise their historic buildings. The Government has put in place a grading system for historic buildings to assess the heritage value of historic buildings in Hong Kong. The grading system is administrative in nature, providing an objective basis for determining the heritage value, and hence the preservation need, of the historic buildings. It does not affect their ownership, management, usage and development rights.

The Government also recognises the need for economic incentives in order to encourage and facilitate private owners to preserve and upkeep their graded buildings. Assistance in the form of grant through the Financial Assistance for Maintenance Scheme on Built Heritage ("the Maintenance Scheme") has been implemented to provide subsidies to private owners of graded historic buildings to carry out maintenance works. For details of the Maintenance Scheme, please visit the Development Bureau's website at <http://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/maintenance/about.htm> or approach the

Commissioner for Heritage's Office under the Bureau via:

Address: Commissioner for Heritage's Office
Development Bureau
Unit 701B, 7/F, Empire Centre
68 Mody Road, Tsim Sha Tsui East
Kowloon, Hong Kong

Email: mhb_enquiry@devb.gov.hk

Phone: 2906 1539

Fax: 2906 1574

Regarding development involving graded historic buildings, the Government encourages owners of graded historic building to explore the possibility of "preservation-cum-development" options to incorporate their graded buildings in the future development. The Government takes proactive approach to discuss with private owners to formulate options for preservation with possible economic incentives that are commensurate with the heritage value of the graded buildings. For successful cases in which economic incentives were offered to conserve the privately-owned graded buildings, the Government provided policy support when the owners of the concerned historic buildings submitted their applications to the relevant authorities (e.g., seeking permissions from the Town Planning Board for planning applications and/or from the Lands Department for lease modification applications) so as to facilitate their preservation-cum-development proposals. Whilst approving these applications, relevant heritage-conservation-related conditions (e.g., the requirements to submit a Conservation Management Plan and/or other heritage conservation measures) were imposed to ensure that the historic buildings are properly conserved throughout the process.

The Government has established an internal mechanism to monitor any plan to demolish or alter declared monuments, proposed monuments, graded buildings or buildings proposed to be graded and this internal mechanism also monitors privately-owned graded historic buildings. Under the internal monitoring mechanism, the Buildings Department, Lands Department and Planning Department will notify CHO and AMO of the Development Bureau of any possible threat which may affect the graded historic buildings that have been brought to the departments' attention through applications submitted by the private owners. CHO and AMO will take timely follow-up actions with the private owners concerned, e.g., approaching them to explore conservation options aiming to strike a balance between preservation of historic buildings and respect for private property rights. Besides, AMO will offer

technical advice from the heritage conservation perspective in relation to the proposed works.

The Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53) also provides protection to privately-owned declared monuments. Specifically, under the Ordinance, a monument (i.e. declared under section 3 of the Ordinance) or proposed monument (i.e. declared under section 2A of the Ordinance) is protected by way of prohibition of any works on them unless with a permit granted by the Authority under section 6 of the Ordinance. In practice, the Government would consider declaring Grade 1 historic buildings which are in demolition threat as proposed monuments whilst at the same time to explore possible preservation-cum-development options with the private owners concerned.

Q9: Whether clear guidelines could be provided to owners on what could and what could not be demolished for each level of graded buildings?

A9: Generally speaking, demolition of a graded building is not encouraged. We recognise that if some form of standard guidelines could be produced, it could facilitate the owners and their architects in considering whether and how to preserve and revitalise their graded buildings. However, given the wide diversity in the building types and architectural features, it would be difficult to provide “one-size-fits-all” guidelines that can cover all circumstances. We will examine to see how a balance could be struck on a case-by-case basis.

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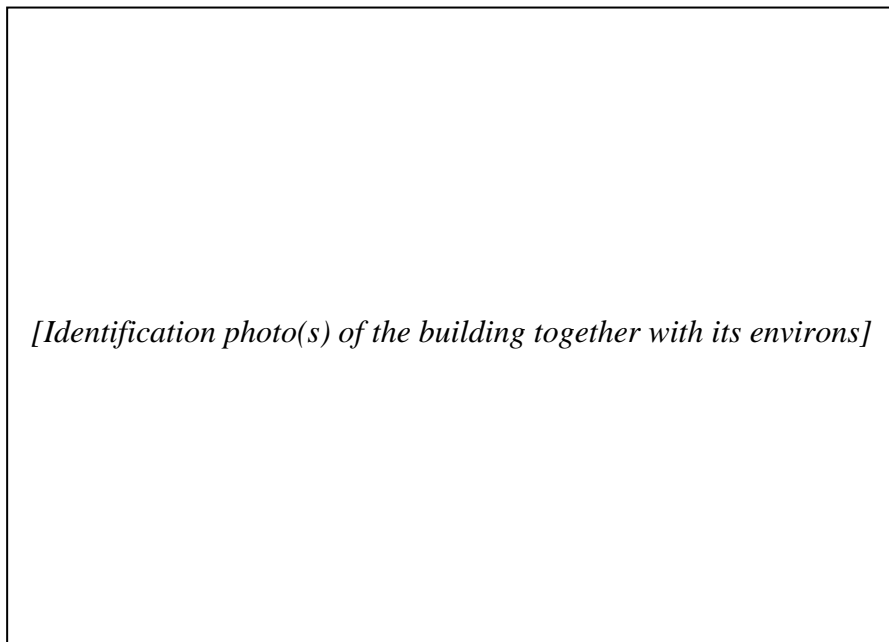
Antiquities and Monuments Office

HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT FORM

(as at 29 December 2005)

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

File Reference : _____
Name of Building(s) : _____
Address : _____
Grading : _____
Year of Construction : _____
Architectural Style : _____
Type (Original Function) : _____
Owner(s) : _____
Current Occupant(s) : _____
Current Use : _____
Architect(s) : _____
Zoning (Plan No.) : _____
Map Reference : _____
Site Area : _____
Building Area : _____
Remarks : _____



Date taken : _____
Source : _____

B. ASSESSMENT

Criterion	Range of Score				Score Awarded
	4	3	2	0 or 1	
<i>1. Historical Interest</i>					
(a) Associated with historical event(s), phase(s) or activity(ies)	Associated with extremely significant event(s) at territory/ national level	Only associated with very significant event(s) at district/ regional level	Only associated with significant event(s) of local community	Little or no association	
(b) Associated with historic figure(s)	Associated with historic figure(s) at territory/ national level	Associated with historic figure(s) at district/ regional level	Associated with historic figure(s) of local community	Little or no association	
(c) Importance in the historical development of Hong Kong	Important at territory level	Only important at district/ regional level	Only important to local community	Little importance	
(d) Age of the building	1899 or earlier	1900-1919	1920-1939	1940-1970	
<i>2. Architectural Merit</i>					
(a) Style - as an example of an architectural style	Excellent example	Very good example	Good example	Ordinary example	
(b) Function - as an example of a building type	Excellent example	Very good example	Good example	Ordinary example	

Criterion	Range of Score				Score Awarded
	4	3	2	0 or 1	
(c) Construction - design, decoration, construction materials, technology and craftsmanship	Excellent construction	Very good construction	Good construction	Ordinary construction	
(d) Aesthetic Value - The building's external appearance contributes to visual quality of its vicinity	Very high aesthetic value	High aesthetic value	Ordinary aesthetic value	Little aesthetic value	
3. Group Value	4	3	2	0 or 1	
(a) Importance in a building cluster of harmonious architectural design and style of Hong Kong or an integral component of an historical complex	Very Important	Important	Some importance	Little or no importance	
(b) Importance in a building cluster showing common cultural value(s) or historical development of Hong Kong	Important to a region	Only important to a district	Only important to a place	Little or no importance to an area	

Criterion	Range of Score				Score Awarded
	4	3	2	0 or 1	
4. Social Value and Local Interest					
(a) Importance as a symbolic or visual landmark recognized by the community	Important at territory level	Important at district/ regional level	Only important to the people of a place	Only important at individual's level	
(b) Importance in depicting "cultural identity" and/ or perpetuating "collective memory" of the community	Important at territory level	Important at district/ regional level	Only important to the people of a place	Only important at individual's level	
5. Authenticity					
(a) Alterations to the building that adversely affect/ enhance its historical significance and architectural integrity	No notable alterations OR Alteration(s)/ change(s) associated with a historic figure/ event that enhanced its heritage/cultural significance or/ and architectural value	Only superficially altered, little impact on overall integrity	Moderately altered, but the original design still discernible	Considerably altered to detract greatly from its integrity	
(b) Modification to the cultural setting and the associated cultural landscapes	Its cultural setting well preserved OR Compatible modification that enhanced the overall ambience/ environment	Only superficially modified, little impact on overall environment	Moderately modified, but the original environment still discernible	Considerably modified to detract greatly from its environment	

Criterion	Range of Score				Score Awarded
6. <i>Rarity</i>	10-12	7-9	4-6	0-3	
Being rare due to the a) historical interest; and/or b) architectural merit; and/or c) group value; and/or d) social value & local interest; and/or e) authenticity of the building (refer to Explanatory Notes, section 3.6)	Very rare	Rare	Moderately rare	Least or not rare	
7. Other Remarks					
Overall Score (Possible Maximum: 68)					

C: GENERAL REMARKS

Sustainability		Range of Grading			Remarks
(i)	<i>Compatibility to current use</i>	<u>High</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Low</u>	
(ii)	<i>Adaptability to adaptive re-use</i>	<u>High</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Low</u>	
(iii)	<i>Others (please specify)</i>				

Assessed by _____ : _____
 (Name: _____)

Date of assessment : _____

Note:

Locally, nationally and internationally, ideas about what constitutes heritage and the relative significance of heritage are subject to change in the light of further discoveries, scholarly re-evaluation, scarcity value, and other factors. The assessments arrived at will therefore be subject to scrutiny and reappraisal from time to time.

**Explanatory Notes of
Historic Building Assessment Form**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The evaluation system and the selection principles for historic buildings (the term “historic buildings” is used to also include historic structures and the immediate adjoining landscape of the buildings in these Explanatory Notes) are derived from the systems and principles adopted in overseas countries as well as the established international documents on heritage conservation, including *Venice Charter* (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites), *Burra Charter* (The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance), and *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* (China ICOMOS).
- 1.2 In drawing up the Assessment Form, the actual situation of Hong Kong has been a crucial factor taken into consideration.

2. Assessment

- 2.1 This assessment is based on a holistic approach pertaining to the relationship between Hong Kong’s historical development and its built heritage.
- 2.2 Due to increasing number of buildings erected and the larger number that have survived, the selection is to a large extent a comparative exercise. This assessment is to identify the best or key exemplars for each of a range of building types. Under this approach, buildings in Hong Kong are classified and assessed according to their original functions and types, namely ancestral hall, Chinese temple, walled village, village house, residence, shophouse, Western military structures, Chinese military structures, law court/ judiciary building, police station, prison, fire station, government office, social welfare institution, medical/ sanitary building, study hall, village school, school by voluntary association, government school, private school, church/ chapel, ethnic religious building, cemetery/ grave, recreation club, cultural/ entertainment venue, market town/ building, custom station, transport facilities, lighthouse, waterworks, communication facilities, bridge, streetscape, commercial building, industrial building, commemorative stone/ plaque/ inscriptions and others.
- 2.3 This assessment form makes reference to the rating method developed by Harold Kalman in the 1970s and with some modification for adapting to the local situations. Each building is assessed against a set of criteria as item 3 below. For each item of the criteria, four ratings are assigned, depending on its significance. For example, significance of some criteria (like historic interest, rarity, landmark value, etc.) can be rated in four different levels as below:

- (a) Only important to an area (e.g. a street or a village);
 - (b) Community/ place [e.g. a clan or a small *heung* (鄉)];
 - (c) District/ region [e.g. Fanling area or a large *heung yeuk* (rural alliance 鄉約 like Alliance of North Sai Kung 西貢北約)]
 - (d) Territory-wide (HKSAR) or national level.
- 24 The grades can be translated into numbers and therefore the building(s) to be assessed can receive a numerical score for ranking from 1 (low importance) to 4 (highest importance) if required. In order to achieve a relative balance between each criteria, the rarity of the building will be rated as 0-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12.

3. CRITERIA

3.1 Historic Interest

- 3.1.1 Close historical association with significant event(s) in the historical and cultural development of Hong Kong.
- 3.1.2 This refers to the association of a building with historic figure(s), being real person(s) important for the development of Hong Kong. For buildings like Chinese temples dedicated to mythical figures, e.g. Hau Wong and Kwan Tai, their association with such mythical figures should be assessed within the framework of the “Social Value and Local Interest” of the buildings (See section 3.4).
- 3.1.3 This refers to the quality of a building which illustrates important aspects of the social, economic, cultural or military history of Hong Kong.
- 3.1.4 The building should bear a testimony to a cultural tradition, a culture or a phenomenon (or phenomena) which is living or which has disappeared.
- 3.1.5 Building age should be above 30 years and the building should have been built in or prior to 1970, unless it is of exceptional quality and significance.

3.2 Architectural Merit

- 3.2.1 This refers to the quality of a building which is of importance to the architectural development of Hong Kong.
- 3.2.2 High score should be accorded to buildings which demonstrate developments in architecture or technology, town-planning or landscape design which illustrate (a) significant stage(s) in local history.
- 3.2.3 Importance to the place for the interest of their architectural design, plan forms, decoration, craftsmanship, construction techniques (e.g. building exhibiting particular technological innovation or virtuosity) or use of materials/ fabric.
- 3.2.4 High score should be accorded to buildings exhibiting an important interchange

of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area, on developments in architecture or technology, town-planning or landscape design.

3.3 Group Value

- 3.3.1 This refers to groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of significant universal value from the point of view of history or architecture.
- 3.3.2 Significance as a group of buildings of harmonious design and style which enhance and exhibit the character or history of a streetscape, a district or a place. The external appearance of a group of buildings reflects obvious visual quality which enhances the aesthetic value of Hong Kong. (e.g. a group of shophouses at Nos. 600 to 626 Shanghai Street exhibit the modern urban streetscape of Hong Kong).
- 3.3.3 The group of buildings should demonstrate a fine example of a historical human settlement or land-use, such as walled villages, terraces or purpose-built compound, which is representative of a culture, or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible changes.
- 3.3.4 The group of buildings should bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition which is living or which has disappeared, or to an important historical development of Hong Kong. (e.g. historic aviation structures at Kai Tak Airport reflecting the aviation development of Hong Kong like Ex-RAF Station, Far East Flying School and the Old Pillbox at Diamond Hill CDA site, are located at Kwun Tong, Kln City and Wong Tai Sin districts respectively).

3.4 Social Value and Local Interest

- 3.4.1 Significance as a symbolic or visual landmark recognized by the community for symbolic, spiritual, emotional or nostalgic reasons.
- 3.4.2 Importance in depicting the “cultural identity” and perpetuating the “collective memory” of the community.
- 3.4.3 The collective memory to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions and customs, with ideas, or with beliefs.

3.5 Authenticity

- 3.5.1 This refers to quality of buildings which have undergone little modifications and retained most of its original features, materials and character.
- 3.5.2 Alterations and additions at a later stage should not detract from the original architectural expression, including its design, material and workmanship or setting and the associated cultural landscapes.

3.5.3 Significant interactions between people and the natural environment are recognized as cultural landscapes.

3.5.4 Except for those changes or alterations that are of historical or architectural significance associated with historic event or figure, or represent a significant technological achievement.

3.6 Rarity

The comparative rarity of a building within the same building type can be assessed in accordance with the following aspects:

3.6.1 Historical Interest:

The rarity of a building can be associated with the historical interest it embodies. The stronger is the association of the building with historical event(s)/ phase(s)/ activity(ies) and/or figure(s), the more it can reflect the historical development of Hong Kong, and/ or the older it is, the higher the score will be allocated to it in terms of rarity; and/or

3.6.2 Architectural Merit:

This can also refer to buildings which represent the only or the few surviving examples of a particular type or style of architecture, building technology or fabric of Hong Kong, and are significant in exhibiting a rare or uncommon design, tradition (including traditional trades and crafts) or custom that is of exceptional interest to the community; and/or

3.6.3 Group value; and/or

3.6.4 Social value and local interest; and/or

3.6.5 Authenticity:

This includes the architectural and cultural integrity and setting of a building.

4. GENERAL REMARKS

4.1 Compatibility to Current Use

4.1.1 The compatibility of the current use of a historic building will be high if such use involves no change to the culturally significant fabric, changes which are substantially reversible, or changes which require a minimal impact.

4.1.2 Grading ranging from “High”, “Medium” to “Low” will serve to indicate the compatibility of the building to current use. Self-explanatory notes to the grading allocated or any comments can be expressed as “Remarks”.

4.2 Adaptability to Adaptive Re-use

4.2.1 Adaptation means modifying a place to suit a proposed compatible use(s).

- 4.2.2 The adaptability will be high if the adaptation will not substantially detract the building from its cultural significance.
- 4.2.3 Grading ranging from “High”, “Medium” to “Low” will serve to indicate the adaptability to adaptive re-use of a historic building. Elaborative notes to the grading allocated or any recommendations can be made under “Remarks”.

REFERENCE

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