

ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD

**Notes of the Forum on Proposed Gradings of 1 444 Historic Buildings
held on Thursday, 30 July 2009 at 10:00 a.m.
in Conference Room, Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre,
Kowloon Park, Haiphong Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon**

Present: Mr Bernard Charnwut CHAN, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Anissa CHAN WONG Lai-kuen, MH, JP
Ms Susanna CHIU Lai-kuen
Mr KWONG Hoi-ying
Mr Andrew LAM Siu-lo, JP
Prof LAU Chi-pang
Ms Lilian LAW Suk-kwan
Dr LEE Ho-yin
Mr Laurence LI Lu-jen
Dr Tracey LU Lie-dan
Dr NG Cho-nam, BBS, JP
Mr NG Yat-cheung, JP
Mr Almon POON Chin-hung, JP
Prof Billy SO Kee-long
Dr Linda TSUI Yee-wan
Ms Heaster CHEUNG Sau-yu (Secretary)
Chief Administration Manager (Antiquities and Monuments)
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Absent with Apologies: Mrs Mariana CHENG CHO Chi-on, BBS, JP
Mr Patrick FUNG Pak-tung, SC
Mr Philip KAN Siu-lun
Prof Bernard LIM Wan-fung, JP
Prof Simon SHEN Xu-hui
Ir Dr Greg WONG Chak-yan, JP
Mr Bryan WONG Kim-yeung
Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS, JP

In Attendance: Development Bureau
Mr Robin LEE Kui-biu
Acting Commissioner for Heritage

Miss Katherine KWONG Lin-bo
Senior Information Officer (Development)

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Mr CHUNG Ling-hoi, JP
Deputy Director (Culture)

Mr CHAN Shing-wai
Acting Assistant Director (Heritage and Museums)

Mr Tom MING Kay-chuen
Executive Secretary (Antiquities and Monuments)

Dr Alan FUNG Chi-ming
Assistant Curator I (Building Survey)

Miss Pauline POON Pui-ting
Assistant Curator II (Building Survey)

Miss Addy WONG Ngan-ping
Senior Marketing Coordinator (Heritage and Museums)

Miss Amanda LEUNG Wing-yee
Senior Executive Assistant (Antiquities and Monuments)

Miss Catherine CHIU Sze-wan
Executive Officer I (Antiquities and Monuments) 2

Architectural Services Department

Mr FONG Siu-wai
Assistant Director (Property Services)

Planning Department

Mrs Alice MAK WONG Kit-fong
Senior Town Planner/Metro and Urban Renewal

The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

Ms Anna S Y KWONG
Mr Freddie HAI
Mr C M LEE
Ms Joan LEUNG

The Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects

Mr Evans IU Po-lung

The Hong Kong Institute of Planners

Dr Peter Cookson SMITH

The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors

Mr Stephen YIP
Mr Raymond CHAN

Opening Remarks

The Chairman thanked Members and departmental representatives for attending the forum on the 1 444 historic buildings with the professional institutes, noting that there was no quorum requirement for the meeting.

2. The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the following four professional institutes to the forum:

- (i) the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA);
- (ii) the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects (HKILA);
- (iii) the Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP); and
- (iv) the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (HKIS).

3. The Chairman recapitulated that the assessment results and proposed gradings of the 1 444 historic buildings were announced on 19 March 2009, followed by a four-month public consultation period which ended on 31 July 2009. As part of the public engagement, six consultation sessions were arranged by the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) to meet with the representatives of 17 District Councils in June and July to collect their views.

4. The Chairman briefed the meeting that the proposed gradings of the 1 444 historic buildings were put forward after an in-depth assessment conducted by an Expert Panel comprising historians as well as members of the HKIA, the HKIP and the Hong Kong Institute of Engineers. He pointed out that with increased public awareness of the importance of heritage conservation in recent years, the results of the assessment had aroused public concern and enquiries. As at July 23, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) had received about 300 submissions from the public.

Item 2 The Forum

5. The Chairman invited the representatives of the professional institutes to express their views.

6. Mr C M LEE, representative of the HKIA, welcomed the Government's move to promulgate the proposed gradings of the historic buildings and to solicit public opinions through open consultation. He also made the following comments and suggestions:

- (i) legal definitions for the gradings of historic buildings could be laid down so as to clear up the general public's misconception that graded historic buildings were monuments;
- (ii) grading work could extend from historic buildings to built heritage, the definition of which should be broadened to include historic buildings, historic sites, cultural landscapes, fung shui woods, landscapes, burial grounds, etc. He opined that the AAB could consider grading built heritage such as Tai O pile shacks, disused salt pans in Yim Tin Tsai, Dragon Garden, Lung Tsai Ng Yuen and the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens;

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- (iii) at present, graded historic buildings were not protected under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance, hence laws should be enacted to protect built heritage which had been graded;
- (iv) some building compounds like Hakka Wai and Lei Yue Mun Barracks should be considered as a whole for the purpose of grading;
- (v) in view of some private property owners' concerns over the impact of the grading on the market values of their properties, the Government should draw up a set of clear economic compensation options such as land exchange, transfer of plot ratio and transfer of redevelopment rights; and
- (vi) reference could be made to the practice of Vancouver's Municipal Government and the Vancouver Heritage Commission, which encouraged private property owners to actively submit information for their properties to be evaluated.

7. Ms Anna KWONG, President of the HKIA, made the following enquiries:

- (i) the implications of the grading of private properties for their owners and the roles played by the Government and the owners after the properties were graded; and
- (ii) the criteria against which a building was accorded Grade 1, Grade 2 or Grade 3 status, as well as the criteria for adjusting the gradings in future.

8. The Chairman responded as follows:

- (i) the AAB would reflect views on the existing legislation to the Development Bureau (DEVB); and
- (ii) the AMO would send written notification to the registered owners of the privately-owned buildings proposed to be graded, explaining to them the definition of each grading of historic buildings, and inviting them to give their views or provide additional information on the proposed gradings by 30 September 2009.

9. Mr Tom MING pointed out that:

- (i) the current grading exercise mainly focused on historic buildings or historic structures but military relics, burial grounds, boundary stones, etc. were not covered. He said that the suggestions of extending the scope of grading would be considered;
- (ii) the grading system was only an administrative measure with no statutory status, reflecting only the heritage value of the buildings. Only declared monuments would be protected under the law; and
- (iii) in most of the existing walled villages, there were only a few of the

original structures still remaining. Considering that the integrity of these walled villages had already been affected, it would be more appropriate to grade the structures therein individually. For Hakka Wai, which was a walled village of a higher degree of integrity, he agreed that the award of an overall grading would be more appropriate. He further pointed out that some owners had expressed the wish to have their buildings in a compound graded individually so as to enhance the flexibility of their future redevelopment or maintenance.

10. Ms Anna KWONG said that sufficient time should be allowed for the owners to submit their views after they had received written notification from the AMO.

11. The Chairman agreed and reiterated that all the current gradings were proposals only. After collecting public opinions, the AAB would make further consideration and deliberation in a thorough manner before making a decision on the gradings.

12. Mr Evans IU, representative of the HKILA, said that they were mainly responsible for landscape design to ensure compatibility with the surrounding environment. He said that in the conservation and restoration of a historic building, consideration should be given to the compatibility of the building with the surrounding environment. The scope of conservation or restoration should even be broadened to cover the whole street or the whole community so as to enhance the historical interest and social significance of the building.

13. Mr Stephen YIP, representative of the HKIS, expressed support for the grading of historic buildings by the AAB and put forth the following suggestions:

- (i) to notify the owners in writing and explain to them the implications of the gradings for them;
- (ii) to step up publicity so as to deepen public knowledge of the proposed gradings;
- (iii) to implement a comprehensive conservation mechanism as soon as possible;
- (iv) to jointly organise public events with professional institutes in order to raise public concerns over heritage issues and public awareness of the importance of heritage conservation; and
- (v) to formulate clear compensation options as soon as possible so as to protect the owners from any economic loss which might be incurred by the grading of their private properties.

14. Mr Raymond CHAN, representative of the HKIS, added that under the existing arrangements:

- (i) the financial assistance rendered to the owners of private properties was insufficient; and

- (ii) there was a lack of a clear mechanism to protect the ownership or development potential of private properties.

15. In response, the Chairman reiterated that the grading system was only an administrative measure with no statutory status and would not affect the ownership of buildings. He then introduced the Financial Assistance for Maintenance Scheme provided by the DEVB for privately-owned graded historic buildings. He also pointed out that the list of Grade 1 buildings was only accepted as providing a “pool” of buildings for the consideration of monument declaration.

16. Mr Stephen YIP said that the public generally had misconceptions about the implications of the grading of their properties. He hoped that the Government would take the initiative to make a clarification.

17. Mr CHUNG Ling-hoi clarified that the grading of the properties would not affect their ownership.

18. Dr Peter Cookson SMITH, representative of the HKIP, said that the new town development in Hong Kong had already led to the loss of many historic buildings over the past 30 years. Hence, he strongly supported the grading of historic buildings by the AAB and agreed to its importance to heritage conservation. He concurred that there was a need for the Government to clarify the definitions and implications of the grading and to put in place a compensation mechanism. He also pointed out that as the value of land often exceeded that of buildings in Hong Kong, given the lack of other economic incentives, the owners would often choose to demolish the historic buildings owned by them for commercial development, which resulted in the hindrance to the conservation of historic buildings in Hong Kong. Besides, he opined that when drawing up long-term policies on environmental planning and urban design, the Government should take heritage conservation into consideration.

19. A Member agreed that community conservation was an ideal mode of conservation. However, with limited land available for development in Hong Kong, community conservation would affect the land sale revenue of the Government. Hence, extensive consultation and public support were essential to the implementation of community conservation.

20. A Member said that the active participation of professional institutes would help increasing public awareness of heritage and conservation issues, and suggested that regional town planning policies be formulated to enhance the conservation of building compounds.

21. A Member considered that enhancing public knowledge of the history of Hong Kong would facilitate the implementation of the policy on heritage conservation.

22. A Member pointed out that the issue of conservation required the active participation of and discussion among different sectors of the society, including professional institutes, the public, building owners and developers.

23. To draw reference from the practice of Vancouver’s Municipal Government and the Vancouver Heritage Commission which encouraged private property owners to

actively apply for their properties to be evaluated, a Member invited Mr C M LEE to explain the mechanism and to illustrate it with examples.

24. The views presented by Mr C M LEE are summarised as follows:

- (i) the owners would actively collect information about their historic buildings and submit conservation proposals to the Heritage Commission to apply for their buildings to be listed as built heritage; and
- (ii) the Commission would consider the applications in accordance with such criteria as the heritage value of the buildings, their integrity as a whole, as well as the benefits of preserving the buildings. If the applications were accepted, the Commission would then propose relevant conservation guidelines to the Municipal Government. The guidelines, once established, should be followed by all government departments.

25. The Chairman asked Mr C M LEE if the Vancouver's Municipal Government could take the initiative to apply for a private building to be listed as built heritage.

26. In response, Mr C M LEE said that while the Municipal Government could take the initiative to do so, the existing mechanism had already provided sufficient incentives for private property owners to make such applications on their own initiative.

27. Ms Anna KWONG enquired whether there was a direct connection between the order of buildings in the same grade on the list and the importance of their rankings.

28. In response, Mr Tom MING emphasised that the buildings were graded based on the six criteria, and that the buildings of the same grade would carry the same meaning of grading. Their order on the list mainly served as serial numbers for easy reference.

29. A Member added that since the formulation of the policy on heritage conservation would involve enormous social resources and amendment to many pieces of relevant ordinances, it was essential to conduct public consultation and to reach social consensus on the issue. Besides, he also emphasised the importance of civic education.

30. A Member said that when planning community redevelopment projects, account should also be taken of the difficulties encountered in the process of heritage conservation. He considered that a sound mechanism would help address the issue.

31. A Member said that the Government should actively implement heritage conservation despite the availability of limited resources and take the matter forward gradually in order of priority.

32. A Member added that the DEVB was going to jointly organise a seminar with the Architectural Conservation Programme of the University of Hong Kong for the interchange of conservation experience with the experts from Canada. The Secretariat would approach the organiser(s) for information about the seminar and would inform

Secretariat

Members of the details in due course.

(Post-meeting note: The seminar was proposed to be held on 21 November 2009, details of which were to be confirmed; the Secretariat would continue to follow up the matter and would keep Members informed of development.)

33. Ms Anna KWONG said that the Institute was willing to promote heritage conservation in co-operation with the AAB.

(Post-meeting note: The HKIA submitted its views on the proposed gradings of the 1 444 historic buildings to the AMO and AAB by fax on 31 July 2009. A copy of the paper is at Annex .)

34. Mr Raymond CHAN suggested that scientific assessment be made of the heritage value of historic buildings and said that members of the HKIS could assist with the assessment.

35. The Chairman thanked the representatives of the four professional institutes for attending the forum and for their valuable opinions.

Item 4 Any Other Business

36. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
September 2009

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