

ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD

Minutes of the Special Meeting
on Tuesday, 25 August 2015 at 11:03 a.m.
in Conference Room, Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre
Kowloon Park, Haiphong Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon

Present: Mr Andrew Lam Siu-lo, JP (Chairman)
Mr Chan Ka-kui, BBS, JP
Prof Ho Pui-yin
Mr Tony Lam Chung-wai
Mr Kenny Lin Ching-pui
Dr Annissa Lui Wai-ling
Ms Theresa Ng Choi-yuk
Ms Janet Pau Heng-ting
Dr Winnie Tang Shuk-ming, JP
Ms Karen Tang Shuk-tak
Dr Joseph Ting Sun-pao
Ms Ava Tse Suk-ying, SBS
Mr Rex Wong Siu-han
Dr Sharon Wong Wai-yee

Mr Asa Lee (Secretary)
Senior Executive Officer (Antiquities and Monuments)
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Absent with Apologies:

Mr Stephen Chan Chit-kwai, BBS, JP
Prof Rebecca Chiu Lai-har, JP
Prof Chung Po-yin
Prof Ho Puay-peng, JP
Mr Philip Liao Yi-kang
Mr Joseph Luc Ngai
Ms Yvonne Shing Mo-han, JP
Sr Wong Bay
Mr Conrad Wong Tin-cheung, BBS, JP

In Attendance: Development Bureau

Mr Albert Lam
Deputy Secretary (Works)1

Mr José Yam
Commissioner for Heritage

Mr Allen Fung
Political Assistant to Secretary for Development

Ms Leonie Lee
Assistant Secretary (Heritage Conservation)3

Mr Eddie Wong
Chief Executive Officer (Heritage Conservation)1

Mr Alex Chung
Assistant Project Manager (Heritage Conservation)6

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Dr Louis Ng
Deputy Director (Culture)

Mr Chan Shing-wai
Assistant Director (Heritage and Museums)

Ms Susanna Siu
Executive Secretary (Antiquities and Monuments)

Ms Veta Wong
Principal Information Officer (Cultural Services)

Mr Kenneth Tam
Chief Heritage Manager (Antiquities & Monuments)

Mr Ng Chi-wo
Curator (Historical Buildings)2

Dr Alan Fung
Assistant Curator I (Buildings Survey)

Planning Department
Mr Eric Yue
Assistant Director / Metro

Architectural Services Department
Mr Hui Chiu-kin
Assistant Director (Property Services)

Mr Lam Sair-ling
Senior Maintenance Surveyor / Heritage

Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed Members and representatives of government bureau and departments to the meeting.

Item 1 Assessment of Historic Buildings (Board Paper AAB/13/2015-16)

2. The Chairman briefed Members that the subject meeting was held to review the grading status of Nos. 369 and 371 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai (the “Buildings”). The Grade 3 status of the Buildings was confirmed in 2009. It was the first time for the AAB to review a confirmed grading in the light of information provided by members of the public. He suggested and Members agreed that, unlike the assessment of proposed gradings recommended by the Historic Buildings Assessment Panel (the “Panel”) for historic buildings that had not yet been assessed before, the one-month public consultation period was not required for the historic buildings with reviewed grading status. In other words, the confirmed grading status would become the new grading status of the Buildings right after the reassessment and endorsement made in this meeting.

3. The Chairman supplemented that the confirmed grading status of any historic building could be reassessed, if new and justified information about the

historic building was received by the AAB. He then invited Mr Ng Chi-wo to brief Members on the background of the case.

4. Mr Ng Chi-wo reported that the AAB received a joint letter and an anonymous letter on 11 August 2015 and 18 August 2015 respectively, which provided information on the Buildings (mainly concerning No. 371 Hennessy Road where the Tung Tak Pawn Shop was situated) and requested a grading reassessment. In this connection, the Panel held an urgent meeting on 17 August 2015 to assess the information received. He continued to elaborate the views of the Panel from the perspectives of historical merit, architectural merit and rarity. Dr Alan Fung carried on with the presentation by showing brief information of twelve pre-World War II shophouses at corner sites, with or without curved corner and verandah, for Members' reference.

5. Mr Ng Chi-wo reported that, after taking into full consideration of their historical interest, rarity and architectural merit, as well as the information received as set out in the two letters, the Panel maintained the Grade 3 status of the Buildings.

6. In response to the Chairman's enquiry, Mr Ng Chi-wo explained that most of the internal architectural features (such as the ceiling decoration, doors, windows and partitions) had been removed or altered. Besides, regarding an opinion in the joint letter that the Buildings were collectively the only curved façade shophouse located at corner site left on Hong Kong Island, he elaborated that curved façade was a common architectural feature in Hong Kong at the time of construction. There were a number of historic buildings of similar architectural design with curved façade in both Hong Kong Island and Kowloon.

7. Mr Tony Lam agreed with the assessment of the Panel, noting that most of the internal architectural features had been removed and only the façade was left intact. Nevertheless, he expressed concerns over the demolition risk of those privately-owned historic buildings with similar architectural style in near future.

8. Ms Ava Tse suggested reviewing the grading status of the Buildings with reference to the grading status of other pawnshops on corner site. Dr Alan Fung subsequently briefed Members the grading status of five pre-World War II pawnshops at corner sites for Members' reference.

9. Further to the Chairman's remark on the significance of Li Yau Tsun and

Ko Ho Ning in the pawn-broking industry, Dr Joseph Ting elaborated that a traditional building for operating pawn business should be a standalone building purposely-built for the said business. For security reasons, it should also be windowless and protected by iron bars. The Buildings were shophouses in urban areas adapted for use as a pawnshop, which could not demonstrate the architectural features of a traditional building specialised for pawn business.

10. Prof Ho Pui-yin agreed with Dr Joseph Ting's comment that the Buildings were not the earliest and traditional buildings for operating pawn business. However, she echoed the concerns of Mr Tony Lam about the demolition risk of similar historic buildings in future. She pointed out that despite the fact that they were not the earliest and the most traditional ones, the Buildings had their own historical merit which deserved preservation, as they could demonstrate how chained pawnshop business addressed the financial needs of the rising population in Hong Kong during the 1920s and 1930s.

11. The Chairman also shared the views of Mr Tony Lam and Prof Ho Pui-yin about the demolition risk. He reiterated that the grading status of a historic building could be reviewed whenever there was a change in its heritage value, such as rarity. Yet, further study could be conducted on establishing a notification system, so that the timely review of grading status could be carried out. Notwithstanding, the meeting today should focus on the review of the grading status of the Buildings.

12. Prof Ho Pui-yin opined that the condition of another pawnshop at corner site, which was also accorded a Grade 3 status in 2014, was not as good as the Buildings. She opined that there might be inconsistency in the grading assessments conducted over the years.

13. The Chairman suggested deciding the grading status of the Buildings by vote so as to give members of the public a clear view of the AAB. 10 out of the 14 Members supported the Panel's recommendation to maintain the Grade 3 status of the Buildings, whilst 3 Members supported to upgrade to Grade 2 and none supported to upgrade to Grade 1. As simple majority could be reached in the voting, the Chairman therefore concluded that the AAB confirmed to maintain the Grade 3 status of the Buildings as recommended by the Panel.

14. Regarding another request in the joint letter to declare the Buildings as proposed monuments under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53)

for the sake of protecting the Buildings from demolition, the Chairman explained to Members that under the prevailing practice, consideration would only be given to those historic buildings with Grade 1 status to be declared as proposed monuments if necessary and justified. After consulting Members on whether the prevailing practice should be followed for the current case, the Chairman concluded that the AAB would not advise the Antiquities Authority to declare the Buildings as proposed monuments, given that the Grade 3 status was maintained.

15. Ms Ava Tse pointed out that the meeting should also address the views stated in another anonymous letter regarding the ranking of historic buildings with the same grading status. The Chairman explained that the reference number of individual historic building was for identification only, and it had no implication on the ranking among those historic buildings accorded with the same grading status. Ms Susanna Siu supplemented that there were only three grading status, namely Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3, in the prevailing grading system, and there was no further ranking for individual graded buildings of the same grading status.

16. Dr Joseph Ting agreed to maintain the Grade 3 status of the Buildings according to the criteria of the prevailing grading assessment. Nevertheless, he suggested conducting grading assessment according to the uses / types of the buildings, for example, assessing the heritage value of historic buildings by grouping them under different categories of uses, such as school, cinema, pawnshop, etc..

17. The Chairman noted the suggestion and advised the issue to be covered in the follow-up of the recommendations under the Policy Review on the Conservation of Built Heritage. He echoed the view of Dr Joseph Ting that conducting grading assessment of historic buildings according to their uses / types would facilitate the AAB to provide more concrete recommendations to the owners of privately-owned historic buildings in terms of the historic features to be preserved. It would also facilitate the AAB to take prompt follow-up actions whenever the condition of a particular historic building had been changed, such as its rarity.

18. Prof Ho Pui-yin suggested liaising with the owner to preserve the façade of the Buildings. Mr Albert Lam mentioned that under the prevailing internal monitoring mechanism, the Commissioner for Heritage's Office ("CHO") of the Development Bureau and the Antiquities and Monuments Office ("AMO") had been alerted when the owner submitted the redevelopment plan in 2008, even

before the Buildings were accorded a grading status. CHO and AMO had proactively approached and liaised with the owner in preserving certain historic features of the Buildings under its redevelopment plan (such as the façade) by offering economic incentives. Subsequently, although different proposals had been suggested after the Buildings were accorded a Grade 3 status, the owner insisted on proceeding with the redevelopment plan for the whole site. The Secretary for Development had recently sent a personal invitation to the owner for a meeting but was turned down by the owner.

19. Mr Kenny Lin pointed out that the façade of the Buildings was altered substantially, when comparing to its original condition in the 1930s. A comprehensive restoration work was necessary if the façade was to be preserved.

Item 2 Any Other Business

20. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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