MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF THE
THE ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD

HERITAGE VIRTUAL TOUR SYSTEM

PURPOSE

To inform Members of the progress of the design and development of the Heritage Virtual Tour System, one of the new initiatives undertaken by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) in providing electronic access of heritage information to the public.

BACKGROUND

2.   Members were informed in the previous Board meetings that the AMO had been working on two electronic database systems on heritage information, namely Geographical Information System on Heritage (GISH) and the Traditional Architectural Information System (TAIS).

3.   The AMO has sizable archives of 80 declared historic buildings/sites in Hong Kong.   The demand for such information from the public, researchers and consultancy firms has been increasing in recent years.   Apart from the provision of hardcopy materials, requests are often received for visiting declared historic buildings/sites and significant historical buildings.   However, access to these buildings is sometimes restricted due to private ownership, periodic maintenance works or remoteness of their location.   Under this circumstance, the AMO has been in discussion with the Information Technology Division (ITD) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) in developing a Heritage Virtual Tour System, which would enhance public appreciation and understanding of Hong Kong's heritage.

4.   In addition, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) has promoted the notion of project learning in recent years.   Historic buildings throughout the territory are valuable resources which provide an ideal environment for active learning.   As there are a total of 1,005 primary and secondary schools with more than 760,000 students, it is difficult for the AMO to provide direct service to them in respect of pre-visit activities due to its limited staffing resources.   To cater for the students' mounting needs on heritage information for project learning, the AMO plans to develop the Heritage Virtual Tour System with interactive presentation programmes, through which teachers can conduct pre-visit briefing and activities in class before bringing students to visit the historical buildings/sites.   It would help to stimulate the students' learning interest.

5.	Furthermore, AMO had introduced three heritage trails, namely Ping Shan, Lung Yeuk Tau, Central and Western Heritage Trails, which link 10-15 spots of historical highlights like declared historic buildings/sites and graded buildings with significant heritage merits. These heritage trails become popular tourist spots well received by both local and overseas visitors. Guide maps for these trails are now available for self-touring. Though photos of selected spots of these trails are also available on the Web, the static mode of heritage presentation still has room for improvement. Virtual touring can provide interactive experience to the viewers to make their on-site visit more interesting and rewarding.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM

6.	With the assistance of the ITD of the LCSD, a consultant has been engaged in early 2006 to carry out the following tasks for the design and development of the system:

(a)	To produce virtual tours of about 60 historic buildings/sites including the 3 heritage trails to provide 360-degree cubical panorama;

(b)	To set up workstations in the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre (HDC) for the public to enjoy the virtual tours to enhance their interest and awareness of heritage preservation;

(c)	To set up 5 kiosks in various locations of Hong Kong for promotion of heritage tourism;

(d)	To develop a Web-based Heritage Virtual Tour System which will be accessible to the pubic online by PCs or PDA for providing deeper insight of Hong Kong heritage to researchers around the world; and

(e)	To produce DVDs of the virtual tours for distribution to school students for learning and activities related to Hong Kong's heritage.

SIGNIFICANCE OF HERITAGE VIRTUAL TOUR SYSTEM

7.	The Heritage Virtual Tour System is a powerful information system, which could enhance viewers' experience in understanding more about Hong Kong's heritage. Viewers can 'travel' in different parts of a heritage site as if they are actually there. In addition, virtual tour technology can enable viewers to have 360-degree view at different locations through a browser. The panoramic view of the site would empower users to bodily experience the details of the design, which is simply unachievable by plain text and pictures. In addition, the release of virtual tour movies through the Internet would allow much wider scope of audience to virtually access the heritage, without physically getting there. This would certainly enhance the effect of the promotion of Hong Kong's heritage preservation.

8.   The design work for the system is at present in good progress. It is scheduled that the system could be launched for public viewing by early 2007.

ADVICE SOUGHT

9.   Members are requested to provide advice and suggestions to the system.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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