

**MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**BUILT HERITAGE CONSERVATION POLICY REVIEW –
RECENT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE**

PURPOSE

To brief Members on the latest progress of the recent public engagement exercise on the built heritage conservation policy review.

BACKGROUND

2004 Public Consultation

2. In February 2004, Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) launched a three-month public consultation on the review of built heritage conservation policy. Specifically, the public was invited to express views on three broad questions, namely, “what should we conserve”; “how do we conserve”; and “how much and who should pay”. A total of 150 written submissions with some 500 views were received, and quite a number of them came from professional organisations and concern groups. A clear consensus on the above three fundamental questions had yet to emerge. We reported the results of the public consultation to the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs (LegCo HA Panel) in November 2004.

Survey on Built Heritage

3. Taking into account the views received from the consultation, we reviewed and developed a new set of criteria for assessing the heritage value of historical buildings from December 2004¹. From March 2005, an expert panel under the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) has been conducting a heritage assessment of some 1,400 historic buildings selected from around 8,800 buildings with more than 50 years of age in Hong Kong recorded from a territory-wide survey. The assessment results of the panel will be considered by the AAB with a view to selecting buildings for declaration or grading. This will also provide a basis for the AAB to consider whether and how the current assessment and grading mechanism would need to be reformed.

4. We have also examined other improvement measures since the consultation in

¹ The new assessment criteria to determine the heritage value cover a wide range of areas, including historical interest, architectural merit, rarity, group value, social value, collective memory and authenticity.

2004. Yet, the formulation of more concrete proposals has yet to be finalized, owing to the complexity of the subject and the general lack of consensus both within the Government and in the community at large, especially on the price we are prepared to pay for built heritage conservation.

PUBLIC FORUMS

5. As reported to the Members at the briefing on 22 January 2007, HAB would, in response to the recent growing public concerns over built heritage conservation, organise a series of public forums in January and February to provide the community with an opportunity to understand our current policy and measures on built heritage conservation, as well as to express views on what and how to conserve our built heritage before we finalise our policy review. Members were also invited to attend the public forums to listen to the views of the general public.

6. Specifically, three types of forums were held:

- (a) Three regional forums (one on Hong Kong Island, one in Kowloon and one in the New Territories) for members of the District Councils (DCs) and other district personalities;
- (b) Three open forums for all members of the public; and
- (c) A focus group discussion with major stakeholder groups and concerned academics and professionals.

7. The response to this round of public discussion on built heritage has been encouraging and over 600 participants attended the forums. We have also made use of other channels (e.g. radio and television programmes, website forum and e-mail) to disseminate information and collect public views. A summary of views initially received is as follows:

- (a) The public generally agrees that there is a need for substantial improvements to the current policy and practices on built heritage with regard to –
 - The current assessment and grading criteria;
 - Formulation of measures to conserve built heritage and on adaptive re-use;
 - Formulation of different financing options to support built heritage conservation initiatives, e.g. setting up of a heritage trust fund;
 - Widening and deepening public participation in heritage conservation matters; and
 - Co-ordination among Government bureaux and departments.
- (b) Quite a substantial number of views point to the inadequacies of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance, which provides only one form for conservation (i.e. declaration of monuments) and is confined to conservation of historic buildings. There have been calls for adopting a

“holistic approach” to heritage conservation. This holistic approach does not only involve revamping the heritage assessment and grading mechanism, but also the widening of the statutory protection from stand-alone individual buildings to groups of buildings, conservation areas and zones.

- (c) While most are supportive of the need to strike a balance between heritage conservation and economic development, views are rather diverse and mixed as to where the balancing point should be. There are also suggestions that economic and social costs-and-benefits analysis on different conservation options should be conducted to facilitate the assessment.
- (d) There are specific concerns expressed over the conservation of specific historic buildings and sites, such as the former Police Married Quarters at Hollywood Road, the Central Police Station Compound, the Queen’s Pier, as well as re-development projects of the Urban Renewal Authority which involve graded historic buildings and heritage sites, including the Wan Chai Market, the Blue House, Lee Tung Street, Tai Yuen Street and Cross Street.
- (e) Though many are mindful of the need for a potentially huge commitment of resources to ensure more effective heritage conservation work, there have been relatively less discussions on where the sources of finances should be. Suggestions in this regard include Government funding, private donations to the heritage trust fund, hypothecation of part of the Betting Duty revenue, and introduction of a heritage tax.

8. We are planning to commission the conduct of a telephone opinion survey on the general public covering the key issues regarding the built heritage conservation, in order to gauge the views of a scientifically representative sample of the general Hong Kong population. Details of the opinion survey will be discussed vide [AAB/7/2007-08]. In the meantime, we are consolidating the public views and comments received from the public forums and other channels.

NEXT STEPS

9. From late March onwards, Secretary for Home Affairs will personally attend the meetings of the 18 DCs to discuss built heritage conservation with DC members, with particular attention to historic buildings and sites in each of the relevant districts. We will also report the aforementioned progress to the LegCo HA Panel on 9 March 2007.

10. We will continue to keep an open mind to listen to the views of the community and take into account the results of this round of public engagement before drawing up a package of concrete improvement proposals on built heritage conservation.

Subject to the results, we expect to be able to announce the proposals and measures on built heritage conservation in the latter half of 2007.

ADVICE SOUGHT

11. Members are invited to note the contents of the paper.

Home Affairs Bureau
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