

Heritage Impact Assessment for
Adaptive Re-use of Mei Ho House as City Hostel

BACKGROUND

Under the Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme (Revitalisation Scheme) Batch I, Secretary for Development has issued an approval-in-principle to the proposal turning Mei Ho House into the “City Hostel” submitted by Hong Kong Youth Hostels Association (HKYHA).

2. Mei Ho House was constructed in 1954 and is the only six-storey Mark I H-shaped resettlement block remaining in Hong Kong. The adaptive re-use scheme will put Mei Ho House into innovative use of a city hostel and transform it into a cultural landmark where cultural exchange among the youths and international visitors are encouraged. An “MEI HO HOUSE LIVELIHOOD DISPLAY GALLERY” (美荷樓生活館) will be provided inside the building to interpret the history of public housing in Shek Kip Mei and Mei Ho House.

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA)

3. In accordance with the relevant Development Bureau Technical Circular and AMO’s Guidance Note on Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) Submission for Revitalisation Scheme, the HIA is prepared to design mitigation measures to minimize adverse impact on the building in the course of conversion and to outline the future interpretation strategies, based on the AMO’s Conservation Guidelines given in the Resource Kit of the Revitalisation Scheme. The HIA has been completed and submitted to AMO.

4. With reference to the HIA, the recommended Conservation Principles for mitigation measures to protect the Mei Ho House and the strategies for interpreting the Mei Ho House are set out below:

- (a) Character defining elements such as the “H-shaped” layout of the block, the signage with old lettering “Mei Ho House” on elevations, sample flats of typical dwelling units, etc. will be well-preserved.

- (b) Structural assessment has been carried out by Architectural Services Department. Findings in the assessment demonstrated that the structural condition of the central block is very poor. Repair methods have been investigated but re-construction of the central block is the most efficient means of restoration. The new central block will become the lobby for each floor, thus the foot-print will slightly be expanded to accommodate the lift for barrier free access and an additional staircase.
- (c) The second major structural problem is on the open access balcony. Repair methods have been studied including replacement of the top layer of concrete, addition of steel beam to support the slab at the soffit, and re-construction. After reviewing the pros and cons of each proposal, re-construction is the most viable. The form and shape of the balcony will be maintained in the re-construction, if practical, and the access balcony will be kept open.
- (d) The facilities for a city hostel should include reception desk, common room (café), convenience store, and self-help washing facilities (laundry), etc. New openings accompanied with new structural strengthening members have to be formed at the cross walls to allow for the provision of the above facilities. The walls at ground floor facing the internal courtyard will be replaced with full height glazed panels such that the internal space will be connected to the courtyard.
- (e) The units will be converted to standard twin rooms except the one at both end of the row. However, due to the small size of the existing rooms, the existing balcony has to be amalgamated into internal space to give a room size of 25 sq.m. inclusive of a bathroom. The steel window grilles at the balcony will be replaced by windows set back from the external wall, whilst maintaining the morphology of the original elevation. The external walls and parapet walls will be decorated with high quality paint to provide better protection to the existing old reinforced concrete.
- (f) A multi-purpose function room is also necessary for sustaining a hostel. It will be added at the east internal courtyard near the central block. It is an independent reversible structure which can be taken down if required.

- (g) A small enclosed space will be added at the west internal courtyard near the central block to provide a decent passage for the tenant to pass from the reception to the lifts in the central block. The construction will be of glazed panels so as to mitigate the visual impact.
- (h) An “MEI HO HOUSE LIVELIHOOD DISPLAY GALLERY” (美荷樓生活館) will be provided at the ground and first floor of the west wing of the outer block to present the history and the early livelihood in Mei Ho House.

5. PowerPoint slides showing the conversion works and mitigation measures are at **Appendix B**.

THE WAY FORWARD

6. AMO has considered and commented the HIA and its recommendation therein. The comments from AMO together with those to be received from the Antiquities Advisory Board will be incorporated in the revised HIA for AMO and AAB members' further consideration.

Hong Kong Youth Hostels Association
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