

**Heritage Impact Assessment for
Renovation Works to Satisfy Requirements for Fringe Club,
South Block, Old Dairy Farm Depot, 2 Lower Albert Road, Central**

BACKGROUND

The Hong Kong Festival Fringe Limited (HKFF) took over the South Block of the semi-derelict Dairy Farm Depot in 1984 and ran it as a non-profit making arts centre, doing minor upgrading works as donations became available, until the inception of the Clubs (Safety of Premise) Ordinance in 1989. Under the Ordinance the building fell within the definition of a clubhouse and was subject to licence; conditions were imposed by the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department and under the licence the Fringe is required to upgrade the building and fire safety, health and hygiene standards.

2. After unsuccessful negotiations with concerned Government Departments to secure a down-grading of the requirements, the HKFF secured funding from the Hong Kong Jockey Club to undertake the compliance works. The HKFF also included essential enhancements to their own theatrical and performance based accommodation in their proposed works.

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA)

3. In order to assess the impacts on this Grade 1 historic building arising from the proposed renovation and to give due consideration to the heritage significance of the building, an HIA was conducted by the HKFF and its consultants and the findings have been taken to AMO for discussion and presented in this paper.

The Proposed Scope of Works

4. A number of items of work under the proposed renovation are required to satisfy the statutory requirements as well as to meet the user's operational requirements. The great majority of the items are works to satisfy statutory requirements and standard building procedures for renovation works and adaptive re-use of buildings in Hong Kong which include re-running pipework, installation of air-conditioning equipment, the re-provisioning of sanitary fitments, etc. A summary of the works items are given as follows:

- (a) Roof opening for new means of escape staircase to roof and a staircase

between Building 2 and Building 3;

- (b) Removal of a staircase connecting Building 1 and Building 2 on 1/F;
- (c) Construction of openings on internal brickwalls for provision of means of escape;
- (d) Modification of the internal staircase at Building 1 (from 1/F to 2/F);
- (e) Relocation of air-conditioning units on the exterior to the upper roof of Building 3;
- (f) Compliance works to the roof parapet as protective barrier;
- (g) Necessary repair and restoration of doors and windows;
- (h) Various building services installation works, such as, flushing tank, grease trap, sprinklers, the associated pipeworks and ductworks, etc.;
- (i) Internal layout alteration at various locations, including kitchen at 2/F Fotogallerie, control rooms at 2/F Fringe Studio and 1/F Fringe Gallery, changing rooms at basement;
- (j) Conversion of G/F Fringe Gallery to a theatre, involving lowering of floor slab and removal of three columns to achieve clear sightline;
- (k) Strengthening of roof at Building 2 for the proposed roof garden and catering facilities; and
- (l) Removal of one column at 1/F Fringe Studio as a result of the removal of the same on G/F Fringe Gallery and to achieve clear sightline.

5. During the discussions with HKFF on the proposed renovation, AMO has expressed its concern that the proposed conversion works might involve irreversible disturbance to historic fabrics (particularly items (j) to (l) in paragraph 3 above) and alternatives should be worked out. Having reviewed the operational need of the FC, the following justifications for the concerned works items are submitted to AMO by the HKFF and its consultants for consideration:

- (a) One of the licensing requirements is to open up all the blocked up windows in the Fringe Theatre on the ground floor; after opening up of all the windows the space is not suitable for the use as a theatre. In addition the present theatre lacks all but the most basic stage facilities, there are no wings, changing rooms, etc. and the exit opens directly onto the street, causing noise issues. A new space on the ground floor has to be found for the Fringe Theatre;
- (b) The optimum solution is to convert the existing Fringe Gallery situated in the middle portion of the building into a new Fringe Theatre. However, the existing headroom in this venue is not sufficient and there

are two possibly non-structural columns and one structural column near the centre of the room potentially blocking the sight lines of the audience. The central column is not identified as character defining element by the HKFF's consultant and the consultant considers that it can be removed by the installation of addition beams at the ceiling. Similarly the two possibly non-structural columns and the ground floor slab are not character defining elements, and therefore the consultant has proposed that they could be removed and lowered respectively such that the venue can be renovated as a "proper" blackbox theatre;

- (c) Another major licensing requirement is to provide a secondary means of escape that could be accessible from every part of the building. A corridor has to be added at the rear side (Wyndham Street side) of the Fringe Studio (another theatre) on the first floor and this will reduce the usable space of this existing theatre. To compensate for the loss of usable space and overcome the sightline problem, the column is proposed to be removed since it is also not a character defining element according to the HKFF's consultant. Strengthening works including insertion of beams will be required for the removal of column;
- (d) To satisfy the requirements for an additional means of escape, a staircase will be added at the roof of Building 2. In order to convert the roof to a roof garden with catering facilities, the roof has to be strengthened by the installation of five steel I-beam and other subsidiary beams at the soffit of the roof slab.

6. Powerpoint slides showing the proposed renovation and mitigation measures are at **Appendix A**.

THE WAY FORWARD

7. AMO has considered and commented on the initial HIA report including its recommendations. The comments from AMO together with those to be received from the Antiquities Advisory Board meeting will be incorporated in the revised HIA report and observed during the renovation works.