

**Heritage Impact Assessment  
Of St. Paul's Primary Catholic School,  
Wong Nai Chung Road, Happy Valley**

**BACKGROUND**

St. Paul's Primary Catholic School is located in Happy Valley, with its major facade fronting Wong Nai Chung Road and the Hong Kong Jockey Club's Race Course. It is noted that the existing school building is a four-storey colonial building with outstanding historical value, characterized with arched windows, pitched roof, and open verandah etc. It was accorded a Grade 2 status by the Antiquities Advisory Board in 1992 and is currently a proposed Grade 2 Historic Building under the assessment exercise of 1,444 historic buildings. The existing main building was built in 1907. It was originally designed as an orphanage.

The project is a new school extension development to provide facilities in accordance with the latest standard of Schedule of Accommodation as laid down by the Education Bureau. The new ten-storey annex (inclusive of covered playground and drop-off area) has been proposed for catering whole-day school provisions with additional 12 classes from the existing 12 classrooms. The new extension will consist of 24 classrooms, multipurpose area, library, general studies room, staff rooms, multi-purpose room and small group teaching rooms to accommodate approximated 800 students. The rooms of the existing Primary Catholic School, on the other hand, will be converted into computer assisted learning room, student activity centre, lecture hall, conference room, music room, language room, art & crafts room, for use by the primary school. A new assembly hall will also be constructed in the existing secondary school block which is going to be connected to the new annex via a link bridge.

**STATEMENT OF CULTURAL VALUE**

The St Paul's Primary Catholic School is an important part of the cultural heritage of Hong Kong for the following reasons:

*Historically*

The place is significant because it is associated with the work of the Sisters of St Paul de Chartres who were the first European women's order to commence work in the early British colony from 1848 onwards. It reflects the growth of their activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the expansion of the original facilities of the Sisters' buildings in Wanchai into Happy Valley. It also demonstrates the physical expansion of the township of Victoria into the Happy Valley area during this period.

*Socially*

In addition to the need for care for abandoned Chinese babies, the place reflects the growing requirement for educational facilities for Chinese children from the 1920s, and the provision of education by missionary religious organizations such as the Sisters of St Paul de Chartres.

*Environmentally*

The site of the building is significant as it overlooks the notable open area of Happy Valley racecourse and it retains significant trees and granite retaining walls to Wong Nai Chung Road, adjacent to the racecourse.

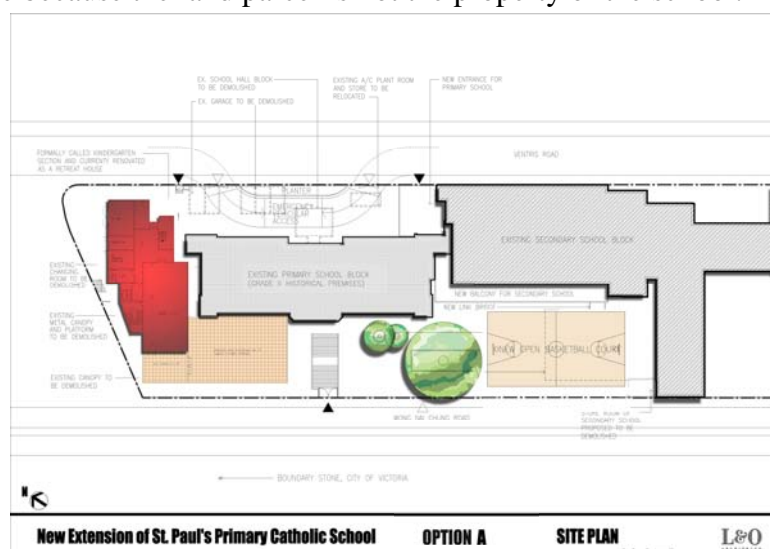
**CURRENT STATUS OF THE BUILDING**

The four level school building was constructed in 1907 on land outside the boundary of the City of Victoria, on the eastern side of Happy Valley Racecourse. It is now surrounded by the high rise residential blocks which face towards the open space of the Racecourse across Wong Nai Chung Road.

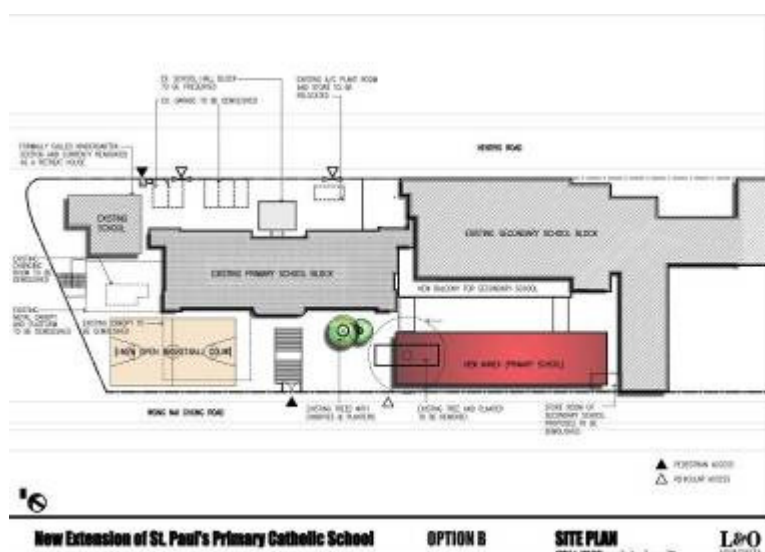
## THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

A number of design options were proposed for the new annex. The options are as follow:

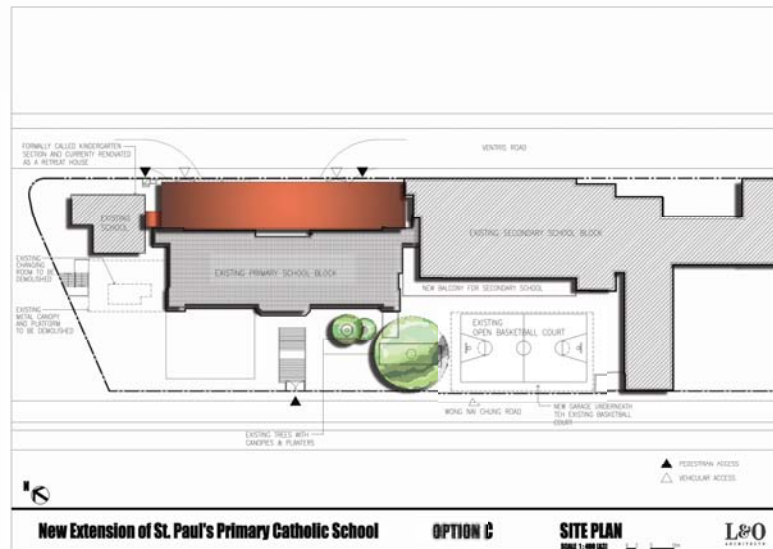
**Option A** The first option is to demolish the existing changing room and build on the northern end of the primary school. This option has the advantage of a new building structurally independent of the primary school and does not intervene with the historical fabric. The three mature trees will also remain intact. This option however is not feasible because the land parcel is not the property of the school.



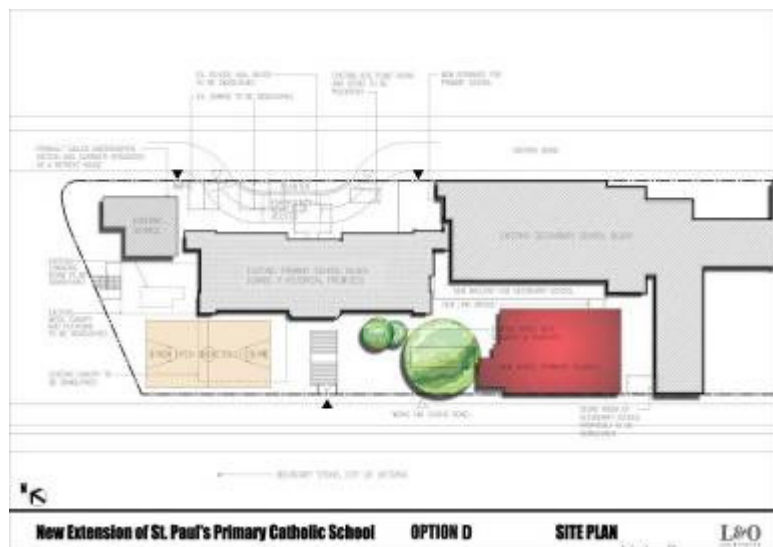
**Option B** The second option is to develop parallel to existing secondary school. The new building will be on the existing playground facing Wong Nai Chung Road. Merits of this option include preservation of the historical facades of the primary school. This option however is disadvantaged that the removal of the Banyan tree may be inevitable.



**Option C** An alternative is to develop abutting the rear façade facing Ventris Road. This option has the advantage of higher planning efficiency, maintaining adjacency between new and existing schools and preserve the major façade facing Wong Nai Chung Road. The disadvantage, however, is that although the rear façade will be preserved, there will be certain degree of visual blockage to the rear façade of the existing school.



**Option D** The last design option combines Options B and C by splitting the program requirement into two annexes. The merit of this option is that the building sizes could be minimized and that the Banyan tree may be preserved. However, the construction of two annexes is likely to entail higher construction cost. Construction two buildings also represent phasing difficulties in terms of school operation.



## **RECOMMENDATION FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Given the diverse issues entailed in this project, each of the design options entails pros and cons. After our assessment (see table below) of the major consideration categories and the historical preservation advantages, we suggested that option C is the most ideal way forward.

	<b>Major Consideration Categories</b>						<b>Score</b>
	Heritage	Health & Safety	Tree Preservation	Traffic	Cost	Environmental	
Option B	2	3	3	3	2	2	14
Option C	1	1	1	2	1	1	7
Option D	3	2	2	1	3	3	14
<b>Key:</b> Option A is not included due to the fact that it is not a feasible option <b>Score matrix:</b> 1 = less disturbance/risk 2 = moderate disturbance/risk 3 = high disturbance/risk Lowest total score = most preferred option							

## **Historical Preservation Advantages**

### **Minimal Adverse Impacts on Existing Building**

Since the new annex is going to be structurally independent to the existing historical building, the construction work only involves minimal removal of certain number of existing balustrade. All removed elements from the existing building will be salvaged and reused.

### **Preservation of Major Façade**

Since the new annex is sitting to the rear façade of the existing building, the view to the school major façade facing Wong Nai Chung Road towards the Race Course is fully preserved.

### **Enhancement of Existing Façade**

The overall façade of the existing school can be enhanced after the addition of the new annex block at the back. The façade of the new annex will be in the similar

language with the existing school, bring harmony to the overall setting of the new school complex.



#### **Opening of Rear Façade**

Though the new annex will be erected adjacent to the rear façade, which is considered as the non-major face of the existing school, the rear façade can be in fact enhanced due to the new annex. In the existing situation, the rear façade of the existing school, is half-storey sunken. The rear façade is therefore visually blocked from Ventris Road by the existing masonry school boundary wall (see photo below). In addition, the space in front of the rear façade is too narrow physically to provide any visual corridor to enchant the motif and décor of the façade. Though there will be certain degree of visual blockage to the rear façade of the existing school due to the new annex, all the potential impacts are well-balanced and curtailed.



#### **Improvement of Approach to Existing Building**

With the construction of the new annex, the rear façade will be opened up. Instead of being fully covered-up. Students, teachers and parents can enjoy the full view of the existing rear façade in the new drop-off area of the new annex. Therefore the currently ignored building façade can be re-addressed.

Additionally, after a discussion with AMO, ArchSD and the School in September 2010, AMO advised that Option C could possibly be more appropriate than the other options in terms of historical preservation. Our recommendation is to opt for the technically feasible solution without compromising the development goal of the School. Therefore, our initial recommendation is Option C, which is to construct the new annex abutting the rear façade facing Ventris Road.

There are some successful cases similar to our recommendation, they are as follow:



Peninsula Hotel, Kowloon

The original 1928 hotel building has been extended with a rear 30 storey section, constructed in 1994. This addition won a Hong Kong Institute of Architects award in 1995.



Intercontinental Hotel, Sydney, NSW

The former 1850s NSW Colonial Secretary's Office building, facing a small city park in downtown Sydney, was converted to a hotel in 1984, with a 30 storey accommodation tower constructed behind the early three storey sandstone structure.



Tivoli Hotel, Adelaide, South Australia

The original Tivoli Hotel was constructed in 1850 and was extended a number of times with the frontage built in 1883-4. An apartment block was added to the rear of the two storey hotel in 2008. The building is located in a narrow street in the centre of Adelaide.

## **CONSERVING THE CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS**

### *External Elements:*

The overall form of the building is significant, and its compact form and plan should be respected and retained.

The following individual elements should be conserved as they form an integral part of the whole building, and serve as character defining elements of the place:

- Overall form of the building - the four level design of the building and all external original detailing, roofing and paving.
- Original wall surfaces and materials including
  - granite plinths, balustrades coping and string courses
  - rendered walls, mouldings and cornice elements
  - exposed brick on columns and pilasters
  - decorative window head panels, pierced quatrefoil motifs and all gothic detailing
  - arched window heads to all arcaded areas
  - wrought iron balustrades and panelling
- Original terracotta pan and roll roof tiles

### *Internal Elements:*

The internal form and configuration is an integral part of the cultural significance of the school building.

The following individual elements are considered significant within the interior and should be conserved:

- French doors and openings to original verandahs
- Stone floor tiles and remaining original terracotta floor tiles
- Render detail to walls and cornices
- Fireplaces to ground floor central rooms including timber surrounds and cast iron grates, and front sitting rooms
- Original timber and metal shutters and screens
- Architectural detailing of columns and pilasters to end walls of north and south end rooms on ground floor and first floor
- Internal foundation stone commemorating opening



## **MITIGATION MEASURES AND COMPENSATORY OUTCOMES**

- Full and detailed architectural and structural record of Service Block.
- Careful links between new and old, retaining significant balustrading and flooring.
- Reinstatement of original roof form of eastern, and western, upper balconies.
- Conservation of all areas of building exposed by removal of Service Block.
- Retention of all material for reuse on site.
- Full conservation of fabric of main section of 1907 building, including reinstatement of open verandahs/galleries.
- Use of the 1907 building for low impact activities, rather than full classes, to extend life of building structure and materials.
- Retention of full public view of main western elevation.
- Clear appreciation of eastern elevation, without service block.
- Retention of trees in front yard.
- Increased safety for students through rear drop off within school grounds off Ventris Road, rather than Wong Nai Chung Road.