

**For discussion
on 17 September 2015**

**BOARD PAPER
AAB/17/2015-16**

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**POLICY REVIEW ON THE
CONSERVATION OF BUILT HERITAGE: PROGRESS REPORT**

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the latest position in implementing the recommendations of the Board pursuant to the earlier policy review on the conservation of built heritage (the Policy Review).

BACKGROUND

2. As announced in the 2013 Policy Address, in the light of experiences in recent years, the Secretary for Development (SDEV) undertook to launch a review of the policy on the conservation of privately-owned historic buildings. In February 2013, SDEV invited the Board to assist in the Policy Review. The Policy Review was completed in December 2014 and the review report was released in January 2015. The executive summary of the report is at Annex. The SDEV welcomes the recommendations of the Board. Task forces have subsequently been set up to follow up the recommendations and work out the details for their implementation.

DIRECTION IN IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic incentives (Recommendations 1(a), 2 and 6)

3. At present, we generally make use of economic incentives to

compensate private owners for their loss due to conservation of built heritage. We would give policy support to their applications to relevant authorities (e.g. the Town Planning Board) for relaxation of plot ratio and/or site coverage. In response to the recommendations of the Board, we are considering the means of providing more attractive economic incentives to private owners beyond compensation. As related policy areas, public resources and financial implications are involved, we are conducting an in-depth study with reference to practices overseas, so as to ensure that the conservation of built heritage and respect for private property rights on the one hand, and to strike a balance between financial consideration and public interest on the other.

4. Upon developing more attractive economic incentives, we will devise a more formalised, systematic and well-publicised mechanism for offering incentives and assistance to private owners of historic buildings in accordance with the scale, building conditions and heritage value of the historic buildings. In the meantime, to encourage private owners to make better use of the economic incentives available, we will set up a new page on our heritage website to share details of successful preservation-cum-development projects involving various kinds of economic incentives. In addition to providing relevant information to private owners at the one-stop portal, it is hoped that this could also stimulate discussion in the community to facilitate our development of more attractive economic incentives.

5. Separately, we have improved the application procedures for the Financial Assistance for Maintenance Scheme (FAS) by introducing a two-stage application mechanism starting from 1 April 2015. Applicants, in particular private owners of village houses, temples, and ancestral halls, generally do not have any knowledge or expertise in building and construction, nor built heritage conservation, and so they found it difficult to complete the application form to provide details and cost estimate for the proposed maintenance works under the past regime. The new mechanism of the FAS, on the other hand, allows an applicant to secure an approval-in-principle in the first stage and appoint a consultant to assist in the preparation of conservation proposal for submission in the second stage. This early involvement of professionals would thus encourage more private owners to apply for grants for maintenance of their graded historic buildings. Other improvements to the FAS are being worked out. For instance, subject to resources being available, we are considering increasing the ceiling of grant for each project in carrying

out more in-depth and comprehensive maintenance works.

Grading mechanism (Recommendation 1(b))

6. We have established an internal mechanism¹ to monitor any demolition of/alterations to monuments/proposed monuments or graded buildings/buildings proposed to be graded. The monitoring mechanism enables the Commissioner for Heritage's Office (CHO) and the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) to take timely and appropriate follow-up actions with the private owners concerned. Currently, Grade 1 historic buildings are included in the pool of buildings to be considered for declaration as monuments under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53) by the Antiquities Authority. CHO and AMO have been approaching owners of privately-owned historic buildings to explore conservation options on receipt of alerts from relevant departments under the mechanism that plans are afoot for the demolition or redevelopment of any privately-owned graded buildings. This notwithstanding, in the light of the Board's recommendation as well as recent views of some sectors of the community over the preservation of Tung Tak Pawn Shop, we are considering whether and how the existing mechanism could be strengthened, such as to closely and regularly monitor historic buildings that are (increasingly) rare in terms of heritage value.

7. Furthermore, we plan to provide more thorough historic building appraisals to support the grading assessment. For example, a bibliography will be included in the appraisal reports of newly assessed buildings to enhance transparency.

8. As the grading assessment for the 1,444 historic buildings is close to completion, it is time to consider the way forward for the assessment exercise. Areas to be considered include whether the age threshold for buildings should be adjusted such that buildings constructed after 1950s would be added to the pool of the study from time to time, how the definition of "built heritage" should be refined such that we could more focus on assessing items that fall within the definition.

¹ Under the mechanism, the Buildings Department, Lands Department and Planning Department will alert CHO and AMO regarding any identified possible threat which may affect privately-owned sites of monuments and historic buildings that have been brought to the departments' attention through applications and enquiries received and in the normal course of duty such as regular inspections.

The “point-line-plane” approach (Recommendations 3(a) and 3(b))

9. With regard to the recommendation of conducting a study to explore the feasibility of conserving and protecting a selected building cluster of unique heritage value under the “point-line-plane” approach, subject to resources being available, we suggest carrying out a pilot study on the building cluster at Tai O, Lantau Island, which has a wide range of historic buildings of different types, ages and uses, that reflect the history and development of the community and place. We will prepare the consultancy brief in due course. Subject to the findings of the pilot study, we will consider whether we should study building cluster(s) that tell the unique development of an area or a community and how the Board’s recommendation in medium term in this respect (such as arranging thematic surveys or mapping exercises) should be implemented.

Alteration and addition works for adaptive re-use of historic buildings (Recommendation 4)

10. An interdepartmental task force has been set up to follow up the recommendation of facilitating the adaptive re-use of historic buildings under the buildings regulations. The task force has exchanged views with the representatives of the professional organisations and stakeholders on various occasions in order to take forward this relatively technical recommendation. As the first step, the task force is working to update/upgrade the “Practice Note for Authorised Persons and Registered Structural Engineers and Registered Geotechnical Engineers on Conservation of Historic Buildings” (APP-69) (the Practice Note) and the “Practice Guidebook for Adaptive Re-use of and Alteration and Addition Works to Heritage Buildings 2012” (the Practice Guidebook), with a view to providing clearer and more concrete guidelines to owners of privately-owned historic buildings who would like to undergo alteration and addition works for adaptive re-use of historic buildings.

11. In addition, the updating/upgrading exercise will incorporate the experiences in carrying out alteration and addition works to historic buildings in the past few years, such as those arising from the projects under the Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme (the Revitalisation Scheme). The updating/upgrading of the Practice Note and Practice Guidebook is expected to be completed by phases in 2016.

Built Heritage Conservation Fund (BHCF) (Recommendation 5)

12. We seek to set up a dedicated fund, providing financial support for various initiatives to promote and support the conservation of built heritage. The BHCF would cover principally the funding for two existing schemes, namely the Revitalisation Scheme and FAS. Subject to resources being available, the BHCF will also support new funding initiatives for carrying out research, public education, publicity activities, conservation studies, etc. We are working out the details of the BHCF including the operational mechanism, the necessary funding and staffing support, etc., and will update Members.

Research, public education and publicity (Recommendations 7, 8, 9(a) to (d))

13. In addition to setting out new funding initiatives for research, public education, publicity activities, conservation studies, etc. under the BHCF mentioned in paragraph 12 above, as the first step to prepare detailed records of historic buildings, AMO is setting up a new team of six members including land surveyors, survey officers and chainman to conduct 3D scanning for historic buildings which are either under threat or worthy of public viewing. The team is expected to operate starting early 2016 with the necessary equipment and machine delivered. In the longer run, we will consider setting up an archive on built heritage for public access and appreciation after the 3D scanning records of historic buildings have been built up to a certain level.

ADVICE SOUGHT

14. Members are invited to note the latest position in implementing the Board's recommendations pursuant to the Policy Review, and offer views. We will keep Members informed of further progress.

Development Bureau

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