HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN RESPECT OF THE LANDSLIP PREVENTION AND MITIGATION WORKS FOR SLOPE FEATURES NOS. 11SW-B/FR7 AND 11SW-B/CR13 WITHIN/NEAR FORMER CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES, SITE

BACKGROUND

1. Under Agreement No. CE 34/2013 (GE) of the Landslip Prevention and Mitigation Works Programme ("LPMitP"), the Civil Engineering and Development Department has proposed to implement landslip prevention and mitigation works for man-made slope features nos. 11SW-B/CR13 and 11SW-B/FR7. Slope feature no. 11SW-B/CR13 is located adjacent to the "Former Central Government Offices ("CGO"), Site"; slope feature no. 11SW-B/FR7 is within the "Former CGO, Site". The purpose of the subject works is to upgrade the two slope features to government standards to safeguard public safety.

2. The Former CGO¹ were completed in the 1950s. The two slope features are part of the northern slope of the Government Hill². The slope features are separated by Battery Path which runs diagonally across the side of the hill as it rises from Queen's Road Central at the east end, to the Former French Mission Building and the precinct of St. John's Cathedral at the west. The location plan of the slope features is shown in **Figures 1 and 2**.

3. The Former CGO, West Wing, located at the crest of slope feature no. 11SW-B/FR7, was completed in 1959 with later additions into a 13-storey L-shaped building accessible from Queen's Road Central and Ice House Street at the ground floor level and from the forecourt from Lower Albert Road on the 7^{th} floor and has been used as government offices for over 50 years.

4. The Former CGO Site, Main Wing, East Wing and West Wing were accorded Grade 1 status by the Antiquities Advisory Board on 17 December 2012. The slope features are also located in proximity to the Former French Mission Building and St. John's Cathedral, which were declared as monuments in 1989 and 1996 respectively.

¹ The Former Central Government Offices comprises the Site, Main, East and West Wings constructed during the 1950s generally as described in the 2009 report Op. cit

² The title "Government Hill" first appears on Pottinger's map dated 1842, which identifies the Murray Barracks as "Government Hill Barracks". The term is used in this report to refer to the land on which the buildings, including the Former CGO site, the Former French Mission Building, St. John's Cathedral and Government House, referred to in this report stand, and to maintain consistency with its use in other heritage assessments relating to this area, also cited in this report.

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

A. Historic and Social Significance

5. The Former CGO had been the principal government offices since the colonial times. Many important policies and decisions contributing to the development of Hong Kong were made therein.

6. The two designated slope features are integral parts of Government Hill that the public who know Central will be familiar with. The slopes are thickly wooded which creates a very particular character for Battery Path. The wooded areas also add a major characteristic on the setting and scenery of some very significant heritage assets including the Former French Mission Building, St. John's Cathedral and the Former CGO.

7. Battery Path is also highly significant historically, given its association with Murray Battery, which is therefore tied directly to the first establishment of the British Colony.

B. Architectural Significance

8. Architecturally, the Former CGO are regarded as some of the bestpreserved examples of 1950s Modernist Functional architecture in Hong Kong and in the region. The building height was carefully designed as low level to preserve the view from Government House towards the Victoria Harbour.

9. The toe stone retaining wall at the toe of slope feature no. 11SW-B/FR7 along the south side of Battery Path was built of local granite in the 1950s, and is a fragment of the first permanent construction on Government Hill. At the top of the path, the square granite blocks are set in regular rows with a plain stone cap on the top of the wall. Further down the path, the wall has a granite plinth and cap and the main wall is built with random shaped blocks. At the bottom of the path the wall has been rebuilt with regular course granite blocks.

10. The railing along Battery Path and beside the northern driveway leading into the "Former CGO, Site" is a waist height iron railing with wave pattern bars and gilded gold finials on each main upright. These railings were designed and installed when the Former CGO were constructed in the 1950s.

11. Near the top of Battery Path, and marking the western boundary of slope feature No. 11SW-B/CR13, are Steps of Battery Path down to Queen's Road Central. The L-shaped steps are believed to have been constructed between 1887 and 1904.

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

12. In accordance with Development Bureau Technical Circular (Works) No. 6/2009, an Heritage Impact Assessment ("HIA") has been carried out to examine the impact of the proposed slope upgrading works on slope features nos. 11SW-B/FR7 and 11SW-B/CR13, and to devise mitigation measures if adverse impact is unavoidable.

A. Conservation Principles to Conserve the Cultural Significance of Slope Features Nos. 11SW-B/FR7 and 11SW-B/CR13

13. The recommended conservation principles for devising and implementing necessary mitigation measures to conserve the slope features nos. 11SW-B/FR7 and 11SW-B/CR13 as an integral part of the "Former CGO, Site" are as follows:

The Character Defining Elements ("CDEs") identified in the HIA to be preserved, repaired or reinstated with minimum interventions include:

- Retaining wall along Battery Path
- Retaining walls generally
- Railings (contemporary with Former CGO)
- Railings (modern) at top of escarpment
- Steps of Battery Path
- Trees and ground cover

B. Key Design Proposals

14. The key proposed works for the landslip prevention and mitigation works for man-made slope features nos. 11SW-B/FR7 and 11SW-B/CR13 are as follows:

a) Project Scope

 i) The project is to implement landslip prevention and mitigation works for man-made slope features nos. 11SW-B/FR7 and 11SW-B/CR13. Plan of works and typical sections of proposed slope upgrading works are at <u>Figures 3 to 5</u>. ii) Considerations

Slope features nos. 11SW-B/FR7 and 11SW-B/CR13

- The fill replacement along the slope crest will be designed to avoid adverse impact to existing trees and the registered Old and Valuable Tree;
- The wall thickening is proposed at the back of the existing masonry retaining wall, instead of at the front of the retaining wall. This will retain the appearance of the existing masonry retaining wall;
- The adoption of recessed soil nail with grillage beam system will avoid exposure of bare concrete on the slope, to minimise visual impact. The existing trees and generally green appearance of the slopes would be retained;
- The soil nails are designed to avoid disturbance of the existing air raid tunnels; and
- The provision of landscape treatment including hydroseeding and native planting will restore the greening of the completed slope works.
- iii) The proposed works are as described below:

Slope feature no. 11SW-B/FR7

- Fill replacement with cement soil at slope crest of western portion adjacent to the Former CGO, West Wing;
- Wall thickening at the back of existing masonry retaining wall;
- Provision of recessed soil nails with grillage beam system at slope feature above masonry wall;
- Provision of landscape treatment including hydroseeding and native shrubs planting on slope feature; and
- Provision or making good of drainage channels at crest and toe of the slope feature.

Slope feature no. 11SW-B/CR13

- Wall thickening at the back of a portion of the existing masonry retaining walls at a short length of the eastern portion;
- Construction of recessed soil nails at the slope feature;
- Making good of drainage channels at crest and toe of the slope feature; and
- Provision of landscape treatment including hydroseeding and native shrubs planting on slope portion of the slope feature.

C. Mitigation Measures for the Proposed Works

15. It is anticipated that overall there will be no adverse physical impacts induced to the surrounding built heritage given the small scale of the works and the long distance of the heritage features from the slopes. Only short-term visual impact will be induced due to temporary removal of shrubs and ground cover during the works. The following mitigation measures will be implemented on the conservation principle stated above:

- Pre- and post-condition surveys and risk assessment will be conducted to record the existing condition of immediately adjacent CDEs and nearby heritage assets including Former French Mission Building, St. John's Cathedral and Former CGO, West Wing. The results will be submitted to the Antiquities and Monuments Office for record;
- (ii) Regular site monitoring and protection measures will be implemented to protect the CDEs against damage during the works;
- (iii) Install and maintain vibration and ground movement monitoring system for declared monuments and graded historic buildings nearby;
- (iv) The works contractor will be carefully briefed on the importance of the heritage and the contractor is required to submit detailed method statements of the slope works and associated risk assessments to demonstrate the works will not damage the existing CDEs and nearby heritage assets. Close supervision will be applied to the contractor's works;
- (v) Inspection of the Old and Valuable Tree and other trees by an arboriculturist will be carried out in advance of the works to confirm that no adverse impact to the trees at the slopes will be caused by the works;
- (vi) Protection of all trees on both slopes including the Old and Valuable Tree on slope feature no. 11SW-B/FR7 and heritage features during the works;
- (vii) The contractor should assign a competent member of the site supervisory staff to oversee and supervise tree works related to arboricultural operation and preservation of trees within the site;
- (viii) The provision of landscape treatment including hydroseeding and planting to restore the greening of the completed slope works; and

(ix) Access to surrounding heritage sites shall be maintained throughout the works.

CONCLUSION

16. The HIA has concluded that overall the works are acceptable and there will be no long term adverse impacts induced to the surrounding heritage assets by the proposed landslip prevention and mitigation works for man-made slope features nos. 11SW-B/FR7 and 11SW-B/CR13. The works will be closely supervised and mitigation measures will be strictly complied with.

Civil Engineering and Development Department December 2018



Figure 1. General Plan



Figure 2. Location Plan



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Figure 4. Typical Section of Proposed Slope Upgrading Works (Section 1-1)



Figure 5. Typical Section of Proposed Slope Upgrading Works (Section 2-2)