

**HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN RESPECT OF  
THE CONVERSION OF OLD WAN CHAI POLICE STATION INTO  
THE HEADQUARTERS OF AN INTERNATIONAL  
INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION**

**BACKGROUND**

Pursuant to the Joint Statement on the Future Establishment of the International Organization for Mediation (Joint Statement) signed by the People's Republic of China with a number of interested States in 2022, the International Organization for Mediation Preparatory Office (IOMed Preparatory Office) was established in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) in early 2023 to carry out the preparatory work for the establishment of the International Organization for Mediation (IOMed), which will be an international inter-governmental organization.

2. The IOMed Preparatory Office is a body concerned in the establishment of an international organization under the International Organizations (Privileges and Immunities) Ordinance (Cap. 558) and is responsible for conducting the negotiation of the relevant international convention (IOMed Convention). Since early 2023, the IOMed Preparatory Office has been organising rounds of international negotiations (including the bidding of the location of the headquarters of the IOMed) and the IOMed is expected to be established soon after the conclusion of negotiation of the IOMed Convention.

3. The IOMed, once established, will provide friendly, flexible, economical and efficient mediation services for international disputes and will be a useful supplement to the existing dispute resolution institutions and means of dispute resolution, providing a new platform for the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

4. The IOMed headquarters, if established in the HKSAR, will strengthen the city's position as an international legal and dispute resolution services centre in the Asia Pacific region under the National 14th 5-Year Plan and the Greater Bay Area Development Plan and mark the first time for the headquarters of an international inter-governmental organization to be hosted in the HKSAR.

5. To strive for setting up the IOMed headquarters in the HKSAR, the Department of Justice (DoJ), in consultation with Development Bureau and Government Property Agency, has conducted a site search and identified Old Wan Chai Police Station (OWCPS), a Grade 2 historic building constructed in 1932, as a suitable site for this purpose. The Central People's Government has supported the proposal and submitted to the IOMed Preparatory Office an expression of interest for hosting the IOMed headquarters in the HKSAR. Subject to success of the bid for hosting the IOMed headquarters in the HKSAR, there is a need to renovate this historic building on a fast-tracked basis, in preparation of the site for accommodation use by the future IOMed and related purposes, with the aim for substantial completion of the project by mid-2025 in order to meet the timeline as agreed by the States participating in the negotiation of the IOMed Convention that the headquarters should be handed-over to IOMed by end 2025.

6. Over the years, the OWCPS has been renovated and altered over time to suit the changing operational needs of Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), which is the current user department. The scope of the project is to convert and refurbish the OWCPS for the purpose of preparing an appropriate site for housing the headquarters of the future IOMed if the bid for hosting the IOMed headquarters in HKSAR is successful, including renovation works for the site and existing building, and setting up of office, mediation and related supporting facilities.

## **STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

### **A. Historic and Contextual Significance**

7. The OWCPS is an important government building in Wan Chai and also one of the landmark buildings in Wan Chai. Originally facing the waterfront, it was regarded as "Hong Kong's Latest Landmark" when it was built in 1932. Its function as a police station and providing for police related services has remained unchanged since its completion around 90 years ago. It is part of the historic development of HKPF in Hong Kong and is the only surviving relic of the Praya East Reclamation Scheme (the Scheme) in 1921-30. It demarcates the shoreline after the Scheme, which is one of the most important urban planning projects in early 20th century of Hong Kong (paragraph 9 below refers). The OWCPS is one of the few remaining pre-war police stations in Hong Kong and is the only surviving example of a pre-war modern design police station.

8. Wan Chai's original coastline in 1841, which was located at Queen's Road East and Wan Chai Road, was subsequently extended outward by way of a series of land reclamation schemes. The first reclamation provided new land for prestigious residential area for Europeans at Spring Garden area. Later on, with the increasing Chinese population, the area became a Chinese residential area.

9. The next reclamation project in Wan Chai was the Scheme from 1921-30. The coastline was extended to today's Gloucester Road. It provided a new piece of land for residential, commercial, community and government use in 1930s. The OWCPS is located on reclaimed land under the Scheme. Further reclamation works were carried out after World War II from 1965 to 1972. New commercial buildings were built in front of the OWCPS. Wan Chai became a vibrant district with different layers of zoning. Land along the coastline is for modern commercial and convention use, whilst the middle area is for commercial and residential mixed use developments. Further south along the hillside is the old district with mostly residential development.

10. There are many historic buildings in Wan Chai such as Hung Shing Temple, Nam Koo Terrace, Old Wan Chai Post Office, Former Wan Chai Market, Blue House, Yellow House, Yuk Hui Temple, Woo Cheong Pawn Shop and tenement cluster at Mallory Street/ Burrows Street.

## **B. Architectural Significance**

11. The OWCPS is one of the few remaining pre-war police station compounds in Hong Kong. It was the largest historical government building in Wan Chai at the time. The OWCPS is one of the few existing public buildings in Hong Kong with a mixture of Neo-classical and Art Deco styles from 1930s. Unlike the other pre-war police stations, the OWCPS employs a modern style with features distinguishing it from other stations. Its symmetrical elevation forms an elegant and neat exterior in contrast to other pitch roof pre-war police stations. It is a police station building of its time, completing Hong Kong story of modern architectural development.

## **HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

12. In accordance with Development Bureau Technical Circular (Works) No. 1/2022, a Heritage Impact Assessment ("HIA") has been carried out to assess the heritage impact of the proposed project scope and design. The HIA sets out the

mitigation measures to avoid adverse impact on the historic building in the course of conversion works and outlines the future interpretation, maintenance and management strategies.

#### **A. Project Proposal**

13. The project aims to convert and refurbish the OWCPS for setting up the headquarters of the IOMed, including renovation works for the site and existing building, and setting up of office, mediation and related supporting facilities.

14. The following functions are required to be accommodated in the refurbished site:

- (a) G/F: New security screening areas and reception and/or waiting area at the main and rear entrances; areas which may be used for exhibition and/or as souvenir shop, meeting facilities, lavatories, back of house/storage areas and open carpark;
- (b) 1/F and mezzanine: mediation facilities, meeting facilities, lavatories and back of house/storage;
- (c) 2/F: mediation facilities, meeting facilities, library, offices, lavatories and back of house/storage;
- (d) 3/F: offices, meeting facilities, back of house/storage facilities and lavatories; and
- (e) R/F: plant room and building services installations.

#### **B. Conservation Principles**

15. The Conservation Policies and Guidelines to conserve and interpret the Site are as follows:

- (a) Use

The OWCPS was originally used as a police station from ground to third floors. The future use of the building shall be compatible in terms of its social mission and structural loading capacity.

(b) Preservation of Building Fabrics

- The main conservation approach of “repair and restoration” is adopted for the Character Defining Elements (CDE) exemplified by the position of Gloucester Road façade of the OWCPs which is a key feature of the historic building.
- The key CDEs shall be preserved with minimum intervention in order to retain the architectural merit of the heritage.
- The key CDEs and features identified of high and exceptional level of significance shall be retained and repaired as far as possible. Those of moderate/ low/ neutral level of significance can be altered or salvaged for reuse. Key CDEs with exceptional and high level of significance are:
  - (i) General: Setting of building which sits along Gloucester Road, building structure, U-shaped layout;
  - (ii) External Elements: front façade with colonnaded arcade and verandahs, rear facades facing Jaffe Road, timber windows/ doors on all facades, terraces, balconies and opened covered walkway, rectangular pediment with a flagpole, main roof, historic cast iron rainwater pipes;
  - (iii) Internal Elements: Authentic spaces including cells no. 1-3, four enclosed staircases, mezzanine floor between G/F and 1/F at southeast corner and corridors with archways on G/F to 3/F, armoury rooms, internal timber windows/ doors, existing exposed fireplaces; and
  - (iv) Surroundings: Circular turret and the access staircase.

(c) Intervention to Building Fabrics

- Intrusive elements in particular the prominent ones and temporary structure shall be removed from the building as far as possible in order to open-up the façade with reference to 1930s photo.
- The deep and thin sunshades overhangs and projections of the facades shall be repaired and restored. The timber windows of the facades from G/F to 3/F shall be repaired and restored to the original design as far as practicable and replaced with same color and design matching the original style if beyond repair. They are to retain the

architectural significance of the 1932 modern style police station.

- The roof floor, which has all along had no public access, can be designed for placement of light weight E&M facilities, especially air-conditioners, to help minimize intervention to the façade or interior space to provide for the additional building services required to support the change of use.

(d) New Alteration and Addition

- New structure higher than the existing building shall be avoided.
- Any new alteration and additional works to the façade of the building shall be at less obstructive location and not affect the character exemplified by the main façades of the building and the U-shaped layout.
- The new alteration and addition works shall be of compatible design and distinguishable from the existing building fabrics.
- New staircase and lift of the building shall be constructed by independent, lightweight structure in a reversible manner.

(e) Interpretation

This project would work towards facilitation of public appreciation of the cultural significance of the OWCPS by suitable site interpretation.

For example:

- Preserve and revitalize the building by keeping the major façades and balconies of the building
- Establish a display area to showcase the historic artifacts, historical photographs of the heritage building and background story, history of the OWCPS and architectural merits of the building.
- Special features reflecting the operation of the OWCPS such as detention cells and armoury to be opened to visitors if possible.
- Salvation of historical fixtures and furniture to be included for future display if possible.

(f) Management

- To facilitate conservation of the Site, the property management and operation teams would ensure understanding of the cultural

significance of the Site and have certain knowledge as to how to conserve it.

- A Maintenance and Management Manual including a detailed plan for the regular upkeep of the built fabric shall be drawn up by the works agent, to ensure that the building will be kept in good condition and used properly.

(g) Documentation

- A documentation mechanism shall be set up. All the studies, researches, investigation findings, mock up results shall be kept in proper filing.
- The whole process of restoration and adaptation of the OWCPS shall be documented for record and future interpretation material. Cartographic, photographic surveys before and after the renovation, restoration and adaptation shall be carried out.

**C. Key Design Proposal**

16. The key proposed works for the project are listed below:

(a) Overall site approach

The OWCPS will be adaptively reused as mediation facilities. Intrusive elements on the existing building will be removed to reveal the original design of the historic building. The setting and U-shaped floor layout will be retained. Upgrading works to comply with current statutory requirements will be carried out, such as improvement of means of escapes and disabled access.

(b) Renovation, restoration and adaptation works

The following works will be carried out to comply with current statutory and operational requirements:

- Addition of lift shaft and two staircases at the courtyard to comply with current statutory requirements for disabled access and means of

escape.

- Demolish later-added temporary structures, including storage area located on the west and covers to parking in the south, rooms on 2/F east wing terrace, room on 2/F terrace facing west side lane, room on G/F besides staircase 4, detention cell, fabric canopies at G/F, partitions at verandahs, and metal panels at west and east side of 1/F verandah.
- Works at all façades:  
Remove all redundant pipes, ducts, conduits, etc as necessary and remove all window type air-conditioners and their metal supports, restore and reinstate altered windows. Preserve in-situ and repair original façades, window or door heads and sills, metal grilles on windows and granite door thresholds. Repaint external walls with reversible paint system.
- Works at the front elevation:  
Preserve and repair historic metal grilles and meshes on G/F. Reinstate door openings of staircases 2 and 3. Remove later-added aluminum cladded frame and door at main entrance on G/F. Replace later-added metal panels with clean laminated glass at 1/F verandah, facing east & west. Restore blocked windows and their openings. Preserve and repair in-situ the bell hook on 1/F verandah and the sun-blades at 2/F verandah.
- Works at the rear elevation:  
Restore blocked French windows and their openings. Add glass canopy and glass enclosure at G/F as security provision. Add glass enclosed corridors at 2/F west and east wings.
- Works at the inner side elevation:  
Enclose existing covered walkway with glass enclosures at 2/F and 3/F west and east wings.
- Works at the side elevations:  
Restore all blocked windows and their openings. Replace the later-added brick wall enclosures at open covered walkway with glass

enclosures at 2/F and 3/F west wings. Restore altered portion of external wall.

- Works on main roof:  
Install BS equipment, ductwork, pipe works and the associated structures.
  
- Works on the interior:  
Repair and repaint the timber frames of windows, historic paneled or glazed doors, fanlights and skirting as necessary. Remove the later-added aluminum windows and fanlights and replace with timber framed windows of design following the original windows. Replace all false ceilings and repair the coved and detailed ceiling as necessary. Remove the gates at French windows on 1/F. Restore the modified fanlights and windows due to installation of air-conditioners or other later-added building services; and restore all blocked windows (blocked by brickworks/ panels/ fixture/ furniture/ partitions) and painted glazing as necessary. Apply 3M security films to window and door glazed panes to enhance security. Install secondary windows and doors/ fire-rated fixed glass to door and window openings for acoustic purpose. Repartition the internal layout of G/F to 3/F and the associated structural strengthening works including demolition of two side walls at the corridor adjacent to the main entrance; enlarge the former report room wall opening to increase waiting area; and demolish the walls in between rooms and corridor to form larger rooms on 1/F and 2/F respectively. Preserve the archways and openings with voussoirs as much as possible. Preserve armoury rooms and detention cells no. 1-3 on G/F with original configurations for new use and will be opened to visitors if possible. Restore blocked fire places at original locations as many as possible.
  
- Works in staircases 1 and 4 :  
Preserve, repair and repaint the metal balustrades and rails. Add metal handrails on the wall side. Remove the later-added aluminum nosing and restore the original finishes in staircases.

- Works in staircases 2 and 3:  
Reinstate the direction of exit at the last flight to G/F. Preserve, repair and repaint the timber balustrades and rails. Add metal handrails on the wall side. Preserve in-situ the metal ladder together with the recesses on walls.
  
- Works on the surroundings:  
Preserve the turret and staircase structure in-situ. Enlarge fence wall opening with new metal gate for vehicular access and repaint the fence walls. Preserve, repair and repaint guarding post numbers painted on wall in building, turret and fence wall. Replace the gates with a new one for the rear entrance and the side lanes. Enhance the landscape of courtyard area with new paving materials and design.

#### **D. Mitigation Measures for the Conversion Works**

17. For areas where impact of the conversion works could not be avoided, the following mitigation measures are to be implemented based on the conservation principles stated above:

- (a) The new external lift and two staircases at the courtyard will be installed at less prominent locations in the alcove spaces. The height of the lift shaft shall be kept to the minimum, and no higher than the top level of the existing roof parapet walls if possible. The construction and materials used shall be lightweight and reversible, such as glass and steel. The design shall be compatible and distinguishable to the historic fabric. Foundation and structure for the new lift and staircases shall be independent from the existing structure. Removal of structural bricks shall be approved by the registered structural engineer (RSE). Sound bricks will be salvaged for future use.
  
- (b) Later-added metal panels at 1/F verandah, facing east and west will be replaced with laminated glass to maintain the open ambience of the verandah. The structural frame of the new laminated glass will be hidden behind the existing structure. Management approach will be adopted at verandahs on 1/F to 3/F by placing barriers such as planters or tensile barriers to avoid physical and visual impact caused by adding new up-to standard balustrades behind existing ones.

- (c) Canopy and corridor at G/F added at rear elevation will not affect the U-shaped layout in-general, while new corridors to be added on 2/F will be set back from the façade to reduce the visual impact. Lightweight and reversible construction will be used with materials such as glass and steel. The design shall be compatible and distinguishable to the historic fabric. Independent structure for new columns and beams will be used.
- (d) The covered walkways at 2/F to 3/F east and west wings will be enclosed by glass in order to allow penetration of natural light to walkways in line with the original design. Structural support for the glass will be hidden behind the existing columns and beams. Clear glass with partial 3M security film will be adopted to minimize visual impact.
- (e) New wall openings to the existing external walls will be made at less prominent locations. For enlargement of original windows to form door openings, the original timber windows will be salvaged for reuse as far as possible. Structural alteration will be kept to the minimal.
- (f) Secondary windows and doors or fixed fire-rated glass to be installed at original windows and door openings shall be installed on the internal side with compatible and distinguishable design and not affecting the external appearance of the windows and doors. 3M security films to be applied on windows shall also be transparent and clear.
- (g) New air-conditioning outdoor units and other building services will be located on the 2/F terrace facing side lane and on the main roof with set back from the parapet and concealed from street level to minimize visual impact. Architectural screening will be provided on 2/F to reduce the visual impact view from the covered walkways. Pipes and ducts will be grouped together in a strategic location to minimize physical and visual impact.
- (h) Intervention due to alteration to suit new use for the interior will be kept to the minimum for new operational needs or to comply with statutory requirements. Photographic and cartographic surveys of the site, including the exterior and interior and all the CDEs, will be carried out before commencement of works. Alterations shall be focused at altered spaces which have less significance, while layout at authentic spaces shall

be preserved as far as possible, and impact to the corridor with archways shall be kept to the minimum.

- (i) For new openings for doorways or Building Services ductworks and modification of door openings, condition survey and structural survey will be conducted. Removal of structural bricks shall be approved by RSE. Sound bricks will be salvaged for future use. Structural strengthening shall be approved by RSE. The voussoirs above original openings shall be preserved in-situ if possible. Damage of cove details on ceiling shall be avoided as far as possible.
- (j) All exposed original fireplaces and stacks will be preserved in-situ except one which will unavoidably be affected due to the re-layout on 2/F to meet essential operational needs. The cast iron and timber components of the affected fireplaces shall be salvaged for restoration work at other possible locations. Blocked fireplaces shall be restored in original locations as far as practicable to recover the architectural significance of the building. Restoration of fireplaces shall follow the design, materials and workmanship of the original fireplaces, and be marked with year of restoration to differentiate from the original ones.
- (k) The proposed demolition of walls on G/F to meet operational needs for security and circulation shall ensure that the historic rectangular layout of former report room (original charge room) remains readable. The proposed demolition of walls to form larger rooms on 1/F and 2/F will mainly be carried out in-between rooms which are less significant. Demolition of corridor walls on 2/F will be kept to the minimum to retain the authentic spaces of corridors as much as possible. Structural strengthening shall be approved by RSE. New structural elements, such as beams and columns added due to demolition of walls, shall be kept to the minimum in terms of numbers and sizes and with appropriate finishes to reduce visual impact. All new structural elements shall be suitably located to avoid imposing visual impact on the original window/ door openings. For all new works, damage to the cove details on ceilings shall be kept to a minimum. Foundation and structure for new beams and columns shall be independent from the existing structure. Removal of structural bricks shall be approved by RSE. Sound bricks will be salvaged for future use. Precautionary measures during demolition and

construction, such as settlement, titling and vibration checkpoints, will be carried out.

- (l) For staircases 2 and 3, the direction of exit will be reinstated at the last flight to G/F according to old record drawings. Structural strengthening will be carried out and shall be approved by RSE. Precautionary measures will be carried out during demolition and construction. Construction will be carried out with care to avoid damage to historic fabric. The timber balustrades and rails shall be salvaged and reused. Reference will be made to the existing ones for new parts of step finishes and balustrade even if the existing part may not be original. New doors at the original opening to Gloucester Road will have compatible and distinguishable design.
  
- (m) Fence wall opening will be enlarged with new metal gate for vehicular access. Removal of structural bricks shall be approved by RSE. Sound bricks will be salvaged for future use. Structural strengthening shall be approved by RSE. Foundation and structure for new beams and columns shall be independent from the existing structure for metal vehicular entrance gate.

## **CONCLUSION**

18. The HIA has concluded that the impact of the proposed conversion works at the Site is considered acceptable and manageable with the proposed mitigation measures. DoJ will ensure that all works carried out for heritage conservation strictly comply with the requirements stipulated in the HIA as endorsed by AMO.

Department of Justice  
December 2023