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HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN RESPECT OF THE REVITALISATION OF THE FONG YUEN STUDY HALL INTO FONG YUEN STUDY HALL – EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CENTER

BACKGROUND

Under Batch VI of the Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme ("Revitalisation Scheme"), the Secretary for Development granted approval-in-principle in June 2022 for the proposed conservation and adaptive re-use of Fong Yuen Study Hall ("FYSH") in Ma Wan, New Territories (please refer to Figure 1 for the location plan) as "Fong Yuen Study Hall – Experiential Learning Center" ("ELC") submitted by the Boys' Brigade, Hong Kong ("BBHK").

2. FYSH is a two-storey school building constructed in 1920s-1930s. It was accorded a Grade 3 status in August 2010 by the Antiquities Advisory Board. It was one of the projects under Batch I of the Revitalisation Scheme and was revitalised into a Tourism & Chinese Cultural Centre cum Ma Wan Residents Museum in 2013. The Government took over the site after the project ceased operation in 2017. The site consists of a two-storey building (Grade 3 historic building), an arched gateway (Grade 3 historic building), a forecourt, low boundary walls, a lift tower*, an external fire escape staircase* and a toilet block* (*added during the previous revitalisation).

3. The current revitalisation proposal is composed of A) an exhibition and learning area (G/F); B) learning area (1/F); C) an office area (1/F); and D) a new integrated toilet and external fire escape staircase block, replacing the existing fire escape staircase and toilet block (please refer to Figures 2 to 7 for the general views).

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

A. Historic Significance

4. The FYSH is the only surviving pre-war school on Ma Wan Island. Built in the 1920s and 1930s, the rich history of the study hall is closely linked to the development of the Chan clan's village settlements and the overall history of Ma Wan

Island. Its primary purpose was to provide basic education to the children of villagers, island residents, and later, those from nearby islands.

5. It played a crucial role in the educational development of not only Ma Wan but also the Lantau region as a whole in the 20th century. Moreover, it served as an exemplary model of the transformation of private study halls into modern village schools in the New Territories, providing insights into the evolution of education in Hong Kong.

B. Architectural Significance

6. The FYSH boasts a remarkable architectural style that highlights the fusion of Chinese and Western elements, while also showcases the evolution of traditional Chinese architecture into modern structures. Although the building form and layout are largely based on the traditional Chinese village houses found on the island, the structure incorporates distinctive Western features, such as a pediment and a balcony with balusters featuring geometric patterns on the main elevation.

7. This hybridised design and construction bears similarities with other examples of *Qiaoxiang* architecture (僑鄉建築) which blends Chinese and Western styles in design and utilises local vernacular Chinese materials, such as clay tiles, wood, stone, and soil, alongside foreign and modern technologies of the time like reinforced concrete. This combination of traditional and modern elements offers a glimpse into the transformation of architectural design in rural area during this period, and serves as a fine example in the modernisation of architectural design and technology in pre-WWII Hong Kong.

C. Social Significance

8. The FYSH has played a vital role in the local community, both in the past and present, by fostering social connections through educational activities within the building and forecourt. Its social significance is further underscored by its association with education and the history of the island community which dated back to the 20th century. This connection was indispensable to the villagers, who had collective memories and long relied on the FYSH as a hub for social and educational activities.

9. In the 2000s, due to the development of Ma Wan, the villagers of Tin Liu village were relocated to the newly built village houses in the current Tin Liu New

Village. Many former students of the FYSH still live in the Tin Liu New Village today. According to the accounts of one of its old students about his memories of the study hall, the experience of studying and playing in the FYSH is one of the few remaining ties and collective memories of the diasporic villagers of Tin Liu Village. Furthermore, the older generation often recalls fond memories of the school days in the FYSH and their childhood lives in Ma Wan.

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT ("HIA")

10. In accordance with the Development Bureau Technical Circular (Works) No. 1/2022, an HIA has been carried out with the objective of drawing up a Conservation Management Plan and assessing the heritage impact of the proposed project scope and design. Based on the AMO's Conservation Guidelines contained in the FYSH's Resource Kit provided under the Revitalisation Scheme, the HIA sets out the mitigation measures to avoid adverse impact on the historic building in the course of revitalisation works and outlines the future interpretation, maintenance and management strategies.

A. Project Proposal

11. Under the Consolidated Project Proposal submitted by the BBHK, the FYSH will be revitalised into ELC, providing exhibitions, experiential workshops, STEM learning sessions, free guided tours and open days for public visitors and specialised guided tours. The following revitalisation works and programmes are proposed:

(a) An indoor heritage interpretation area will be established on the ground floor in the building. It will showcase the rich history of the FYSH and the Ma Wan area, conveying the cultural significance of the historic building, the traditional Hakka livelihood in Tin Liu, the history of old Ma Wan and the process of previous and current revitalisation works.

(b) Learning areas will be set up on the ground and first floors to provide STEM learning sessions and workshops.

(c) An administrative office will be provided on the first floor to support the operation and management of the historic building.

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(d) The existing fire escape staircase and toilet block will be replaced with a better-designed, low-rising block incorporated with fire-escape staircase, toilets, and other building services facilities. This new integrated staircase and toilet block will be located further away from the historic building than the current fire-escape staircase. The steps of the wider new staircase will also serve as stair seating for the open forecourt, hence, the reconstruction of the escape staircase and toilet block will encourage the use of the open forecourt for public gatherings by the local community, visitors and students.

(e) Regular guided tours will be organised at the FYSH to enhance public appreciation for its cultural significance. Historical, cultural and ecological tours in Ma Wan will also be organised and provided by the BBHK.

B. Conservation Principles

12. The Conservation Policies and Guidelines to conserve and interpret the FYSH are as follows:

(a) New Use

(i) The FYSH was formerly built to house a school. The new use of the FYSH should be compatible with its original use. The proposed use should be accommodated as far as possible within the existing layout of the historic building to avoid any unnecessary interventions.

(ii) The proposed use should also be compatible with the structural loading capacity of the historic building.

(b) Built Fabric

(i) The key character-defining elements ("CDEs") of the FYSH should be subject to minimal intervention in order to preserve their characteristics and heritage value.

(ii) Prioritise the principle of repair over replacement when carrying out conservation works. The identified CDEs should be retained and repaired to the greatest possible extent to maintain the architectural merits of this historic building. Key CDEs with high level of significances are:

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General Setting and Site Context

- Integrity of the site, spatial organisation and architectural form; and

- Entrance gateway, low boundary walls, forecourt spatial setting.

Exterior

- Front elevation with roof pediment and parapet, as well as the balcony and its supporting structures, the balustrade with geometric patterns, restored main entrance door and the original granite threshold, restored balcony doors, restored timber windows and metal grilles;

- Flat roof, roof pediment and parapet with projecting profiles, decorative motifs in plastered relief, and plastered characters "芳園書室" (name of the school FYSH) in Chinese calligraphy and restored Chinese-style pitched roof and structure; and

- Stone gable walls, all projecting fins above windows and rear exit doors, restored ceramic downpipe casement, rear exit door openings and lintel.

Interior

- Interior spatial configurations with two open-floor spaces separated by a brick partition wall on each floor;

- Concrete beams with decorative mouldings;

- Concrete column and brick partition wall with original openings and with decorative mouldings;

- Original internal concrete staircase and its balustrade; and

- Internal recessed wall enclave for the window in-swings.

(c) Additions and Alterations

(i) The design of new additional works should be compatible with the existing historic building fabric while also being

distinguishable from it. In the event that removal of these additions is required in the future, they should be reversible without causing any unnecessary damage to the existing building fabric.

(ii) Any new building block, which replaces the existing one (added in last revitalisation) should be as compact as it is technically possible, while balancing the need of future user and should maintain a visual and architectural distinction with the original historic building.

(iii) Provision for a new additional structure should be set away or detached from the existing structure to the greatest extent practical in order to create a readable narrative and minimise adverse visual impact to the historic building.

(iv) Avoid any intervention in the CDEs of the building where feasible, in order to preserve the historical and cultural significance of the site.

(v) Building services and systems should be carefully designed to minimise any potential adverse impact on the CDEs.

(d) Setting and landscape

Preserve the setting of open space at the front of the FYSH. Any future modification or improvement works to this area should respect the existing natural landscape around the site.

(e) Interpretation

Provide interpretation to explain and promote cultural significance of the historic site to the general public. Designated areas inside the building should be reserved for displays, guided tours, and other forms of interpretation to encourage visitors to engage with the site and foster a deeper understanding of its heritage value.

(f) Documentation

Cartographic and photographic surveys to properly record the historic building will be conducted before commencement of works. All the studies, researches, investigation findings, mock-up results shall be kept in proper filing. The process of renovation of the FYSH shall be documented for record and interpretation purposes.

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(g) Management and Maintenance

Establish a detailed maintenance and management plan to ensure the proper use and preservation of a historic building during operation. This plan should guarantee that the heritage site will be kept in good condition and in compliance with conservation policies and best practices.

C. Key Design Proposal

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

(a) Overall site approach

(i) The project intends to renovate and adaptively re-use the existing FYSH as ELC with learning areas, exhibition area and office area.

(ii) A new integrated fire escape staircase and toilet block will replace the existing fire escape staircase and toilet block, together with a new pump house as a new block. It will be lower than the existing toilet block and located further away from the historic building, leaving the north façade to be more visible for appreciation by visitors.

(iii) The existing fire services water tank and flush water tank will be relocated to the outside of the low boundary wall. While the entrance gateway and low boundary walls will be repainted, the new landscape design of the forecourt will maintain its current openness.

(b) Conservation and Conversion Works:

(i) Exterior

No major works will be carried out on the façades and roof of the historic building, except the following:

- Clean, repair and repaint the facades of the building and boundary walls;
- Clean, repair and repaint the roof and its structure;
- Clean, repair and repaint the restored main entrance doors, restored balcony doors, restored timber windows and grilles; and

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- Take down and re-install the existing fire-rated (FRR) glasses on north and west façade from the external side to the space between the timber windows and metal grills, in order to minimise the visual impact and clearly disclose the historic appearance.

(ii) Interior

The layout and setting of the interior will be retained, with the following works proposed:

- Repair and repaint the interior walls, ceilings, beams and columns;
- Replace the existing fire escape doors with new ones;
- Installation of new operable wall panels to the interior side walls and new storage shelves to the brick partition walls; and
- Rearrange and reroute the building services elements (e.g. indoor air-conditioner units and conduits, components of the fire safety system, electrical conduits and junction boxes, etc.) to provide a tidier outlook and minimise visual disturbance to the underside of the roof.

(c) Preserved features for heritage interpretation

The following will be preserved and interpreted by guided tours:

- Low boundary walls and arched entrance gateway;
- Front elevation with roof pediment and parapet, the balcony and its supporting structures, the balustrade with geometric patterns, restored main entrance door and original granite threshold, restored balcony doors, and restored timber windows and grilles;
- Roof pediment and parapet with projecting profiles, decorative motifs in plastered relief, and plastered characters "芳園書室" (name of the school FYSH) in Chinese calligraphy;
- Side elevations with projected fins over windows;
- Original internal staircase and balustrade;

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- Restored tiled roof and timber structure;

- Exposed wall surface showing granite blocks of the northern façade gable wall;

- All decorative mouldings and internal recessed wall enclave for the window in-swings; and

- General spatial organisation of the site and the interior.

(d) Proposal relating to the compliance of statutory requirements of the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) or other modern-day requirements apart from the issues discussed above:

- The fire safety provisions of the current proposal followed that of the last revitalisation, using Fire Engineering Study approach. The existing fire service installation provisions of fire hose, hose reel, sprinkler system, manual fire alarm, visual fire alarm, emergency lighting and exit signs will be retained or replaced as required by the authorities; and

- The existing lift tower at the rear elevation will be retained, overhauled and reused.

D. Mitigation Measures for the Conversion Works

14. 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) Regarding the new staircase, pump house and toilet block are as follow:

(i) It will be located as far away as possible from the existing historic building to minimise visual impact and open up the north facade and the forecourt.

(ii) It will adopt a low-profile design as not to overwhelm the outlook of the FYSH. The new design will be lower than the existing toilet

block in height, reducing visual disturbance to the historic building. The structure will be light-weight and self-supported without affecting the structural stability of the FYSH.

(iii) The size will be as compact as possible so as not to intervene the historic building.

(iv) The new staircase, pump house and toilet block will be finished with grey paint with steel and metal wire mesh balustrade, and will be easily distinguishable from the historic building.

(b) The new fibre-glass water tanks will be installed between the retaining wall and the low boundary wall. Trees will be planted around and screening will be provided to help mask the water tanks.

(c) The design of the new garden area in the forecourt will preserve the existing trees. Additional soft and hard landscape elements will not obstruct the front façade.

(d) The existing FRR glasses on the exterior side of the windows will be taken down with due care to minimise the damage to the plaster renderings and granite blocks/bricks on the facades. Restored timber windows are to be taken down temporarily, properly recorded and well protected. They will be reinstalled after the installation of the FRR glasses between the timber windows and metal grills.

(e) The height of the existing historical balustrades of the balcony does not comply with the current statutory requirements. In this revitalisation proposal, it will continue the current practice of "management approach". General visitors and users can appreciate the balcony via the glass panels of the balcony doors and windows, but access to the balcony will be blocked as to avoid potential hazards.

(f) The original building layout and spatial organisation will not be altered with exhibition set up on G/F in order not to overload the existing structural capacity of the FYSH.

(g) The interior design including the design of exit door, floor finishes, new operable wall panels, and storage shelves should be in minimal and subtle design, which could be distinguishable and will not overwhelm the existing historic fabrics.

(h) The installation of new panels and shelves should be carefully designed in such a way that the original recessed wall surface of windows and decorative mouldings will still be exposed and viewable by the visitors. The team is seeking to extend the exposed portion of the original gable wall for better understanding and interpretation of the architecture and construction.

(i) Building services elements and conduits will be rearranged and re-routed to minimise visual disturbance to the CDEs. Existing openings on walls will be utilised as far as technically feasible. The exposed routing will be contained in a light trough trunking along the wall with minimal dimensions, be placed at less prominent locations and tidily aligned to minimise disturbance and visual impact to historic fabrics of timber roof structure and decorative mouldings.

(j) Cartographic and photographic surveys to record the FYSH will be conducted before commencement of the construction works. A set of record drawings will be prepared and furnished to AMO after completion.

(k) Provision for protection of CDEs will be incorporated into the contract documents for the construction works, followed by regular monitoring of the protection measures by site supervisory staff during the construction.

(l) Any renovation, alteration and maintenance works during the construction and future operation of the building should follow the principles set out in the HIA and prior consultation with the relevant bureaux / departments as necessary.

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CONCLUSION

15. The HIA has concluded that the impact of the proposed revitalisation works at the FYSH is considered acceptable and manageable with the proposed mitigation measures. Fong Yuen Study Hall – Experiential Learning Center Limited will ensure that all works carried out for heritage conservation strictly comply with the requirements stipulated in the HIA as endorsed by the AMO.

Fong Yuen Study Hall – Experiential Learning Center Limited

March 2024

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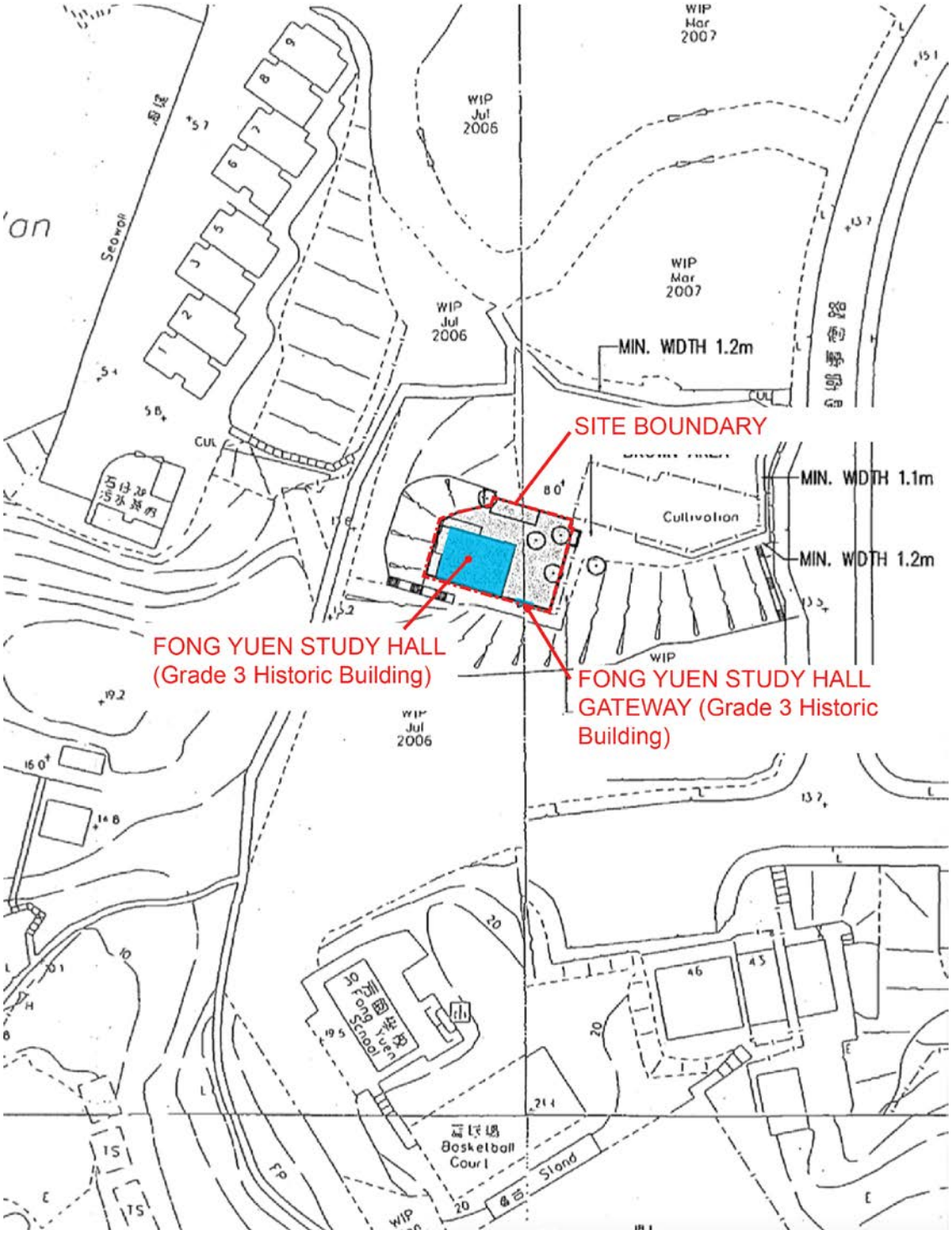

Figure 1. Site Plan of the project

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Figure 2. General view of the FYSH

Figure 3. East façade of the FYSH

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Figure 4. The later-added toilet block (2013 Revitalisation Scheme)

Figure 5. The later-added external staircase (2013 Revitalisation Scheme)

Figure 6. South façade of the FYSH

Figure 7.West façade of the FYSH

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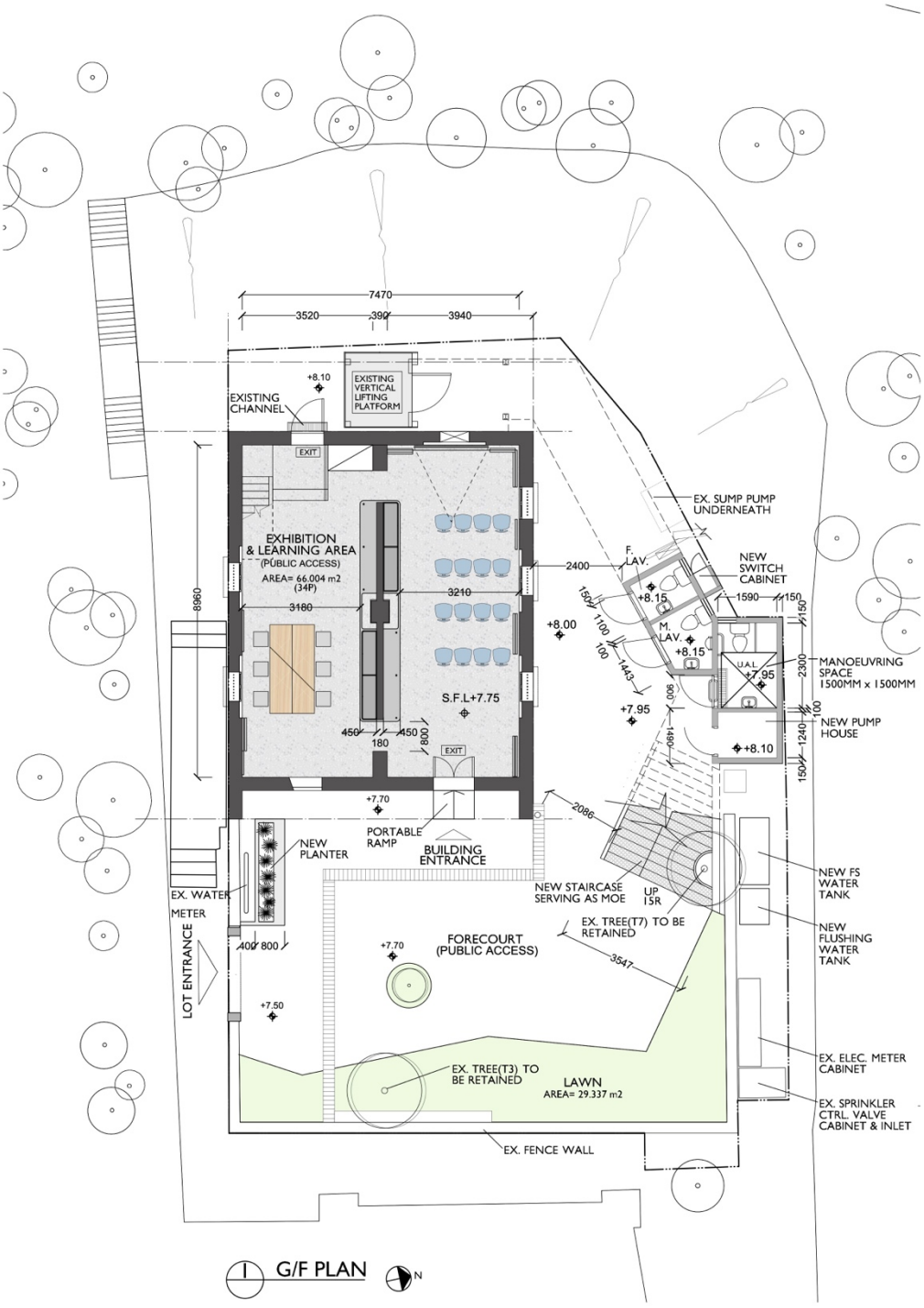

Figure 8. Ground floor plan – proposed layout of the ELC

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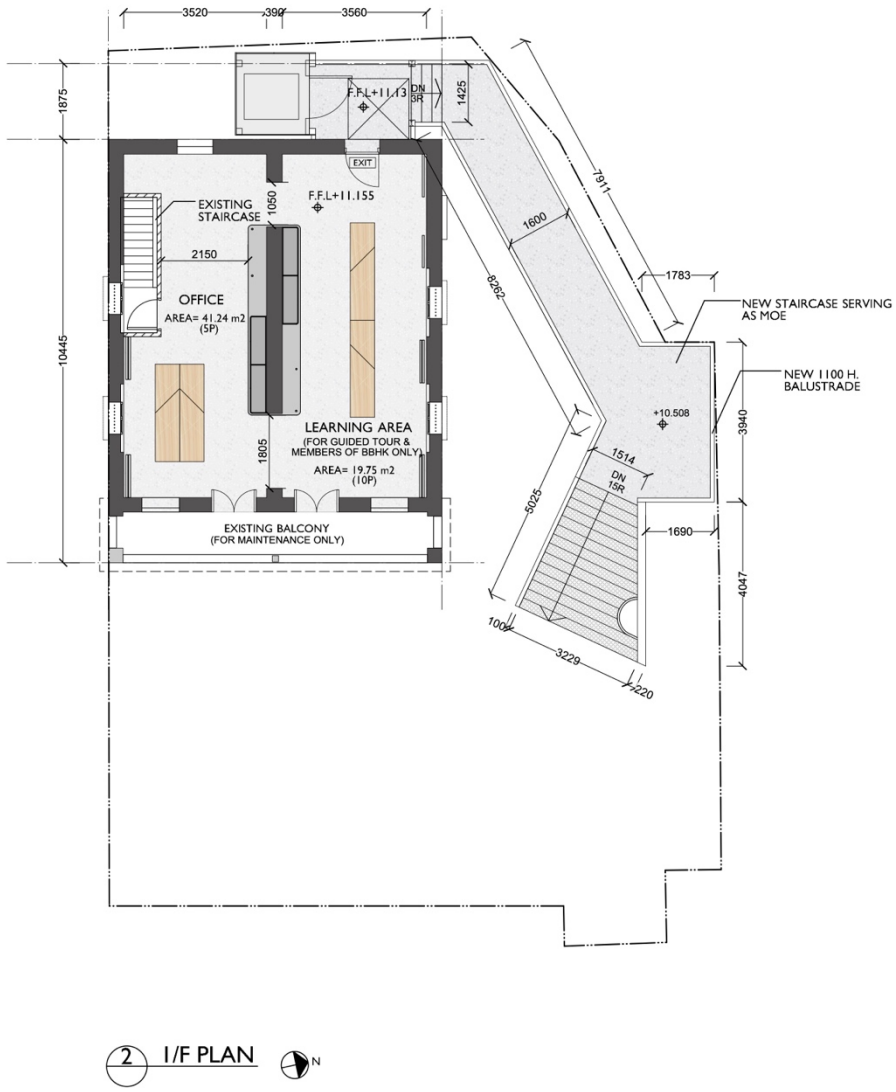

Figure 9. First floor plan – Proposed layout of the ELC

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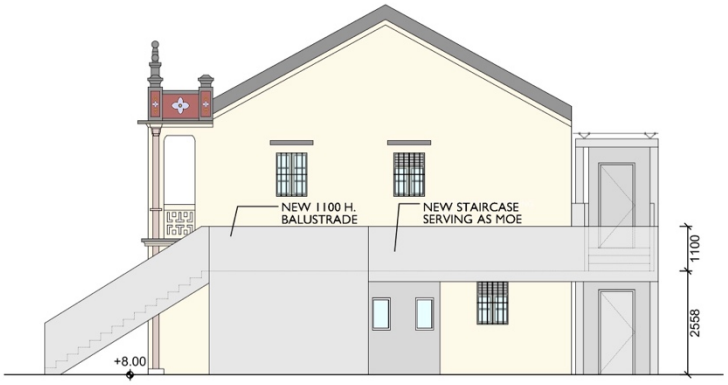
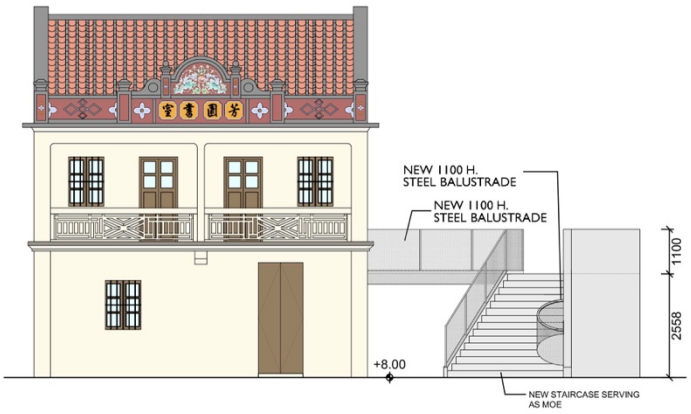
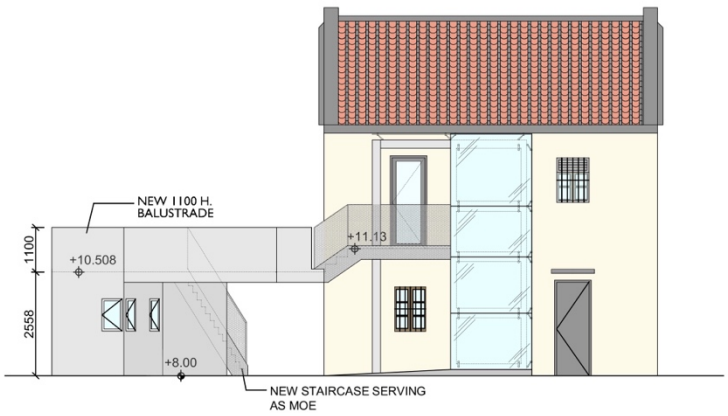


3 NORTH ELEVATION



4 FRONT ELEVATION



5 REAR ELEVATION

Figure 10. Elevations – proposed design of the ELC

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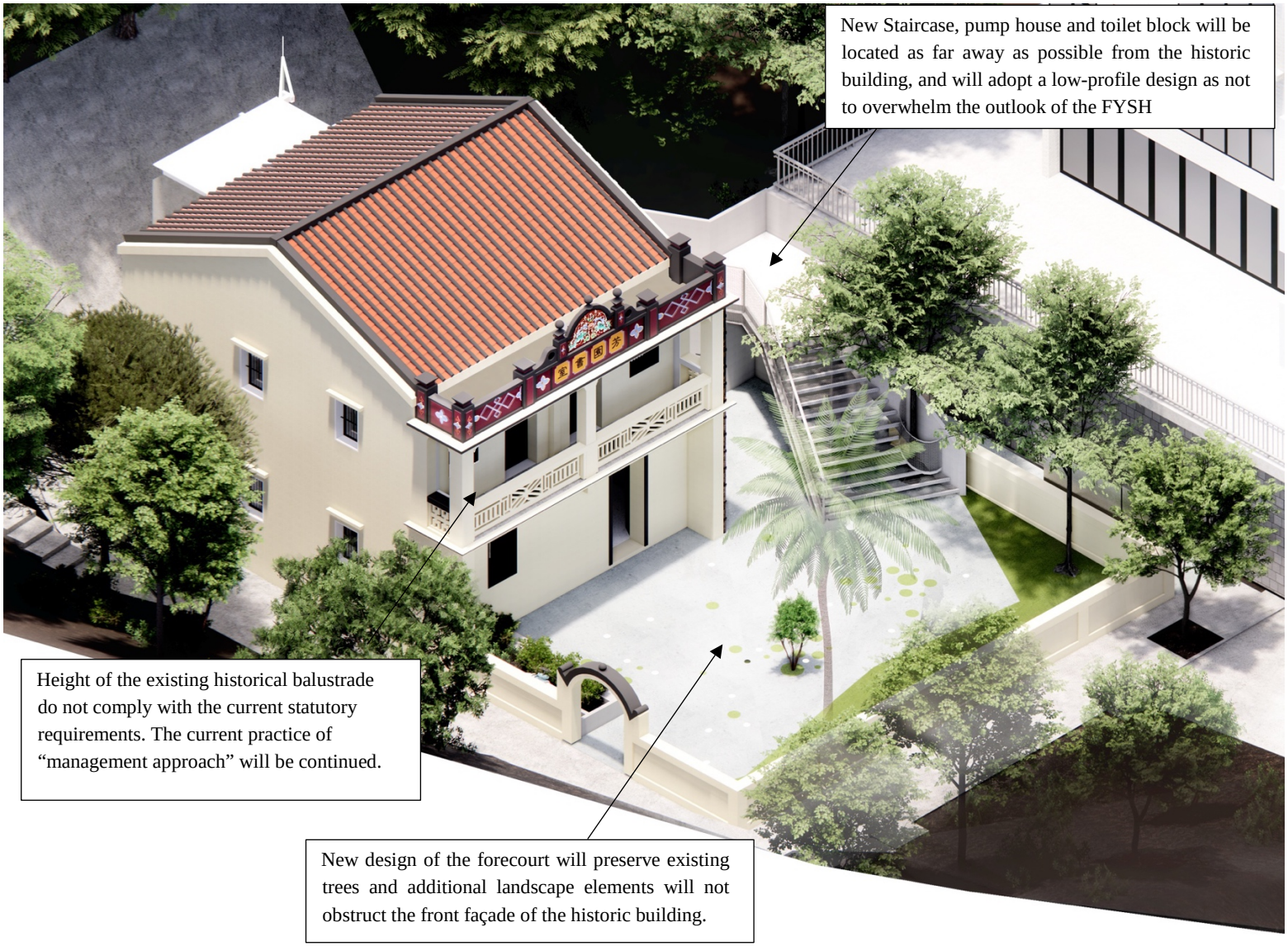

Figure 11. Artist impression of the overview of the project site

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Figure 12. Artist impression of the front view of the project

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Figure 13. Comparison between the new fire escape staircase and toilet block (base drawing) and the existing staircase and the existing toilet block (outlined in red)

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Figure 14. Artist impression of the ground floor interior space

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Figure 15. Artist impression of the first floor interior space