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Central & Western Concern Group

a heritage conservation & good urban planning advocacy group
www.centralandwestern.org

Postal Address:

13 June 2012

The Chairman, Bernard Chan
Antiquities Advisory Board
c/- Antiquities and Monuments Office
Nathan Road
Tsim Sha Tsui
Kowloon
Hong Kong

Dear Bernard

Re: Central Government Offices (CGO) and West Wing Grading

I have thoroughly read all the papers relating to the Central Government Offices and West Wing Grading - to be discussed at tomorrow's meeting of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB).

I am sure you will agree, that the Members of the AAB, including yourself, wish to uphold the highest professionalism – especially in the delicate grading exercise of Hong Kong's built heritage.

Consequently, the Heritage Impact Assessment organized by the Architectural Services Department as a requirement for the capital works and conversion of the Main Wing and East Wing for use by the Department of Justice is thorough and conclusive. However, it is extraordinary that this HIA has not included the West Wing and discussed the complete complex of buildings including the West Wing that relate to the historic Government Hill area.

The AAB agreed to grade the entire CGO complex and the West Wing in its November 2011 meeting and this gave ample time and opportunity for the three Wings and the entire CGO to be heritage assessed within the same HIA (even though technically, as the West Wing is to be demolished in government plans, it does not qualify to have an HIA). The HIA further implies that the "Compound" it refers to, covers only the Main Wing, East Wing and the adjacent land, but not necessarily the whole compound of West Wing and the land designated to be sold by the government. Is this correct?

In terms of good practice and to ensure that the AAB and its Members can make an informed decision on grading the entire complex (including the West Wing and its surrounding land), the HIA should have been comprehensive by covering the West Wing. How was the decision made to not, at a minimum, undertake a separate HIA for the West Wing?

Consequently, the AAB has relied on assessing the West Wing in a manner similar to the other 1,444 building that the AAB has and will grade: through the research of an AAB appointed Expert Panel. But where is the report of the Expert Panel and their findings and justification for their grading?

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And furthermore, why has the AMO in its recommendations in papers tabled to the AAB, not given any justifications for the grading of the West Wing, the entire complex of buildings or discussed its exclusion from the HIA?

Many Hong Kong architecture and heritage professionals have acknowledged that the entire Government Hill is an integral whole and should be preserved as a unique example of modernist architectural style. And now, internationally, ICOMOS have issued a Heritage Alert on the entire Government Hill as it is considered to be under threat of irreversible damage and on the West Wing, which could be demolished if government redevelopment plans for the CGO site are enacted. In November 2011, The People's Republic of China adopted a UNESCO sponsored Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape and, on 11 June the PRC's Information Office of the State Council published the National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2012-2015) that includes provisions for economic, social and cultural rights.

National agencies, international and local architecture and heritage professionals are speaking with a loud and clear voice for the preservation of the entire Government Hill.

I request and call on you and Members of the AAB to ensure the protection of Government Hill, the West Wing and the entire CGO environment; to uphold the highest professionalism and be transparent.

Please circulate this letter to all AAB Members. Many thanks!

I can be contacted by ringing

Kind regards

John Batten
Convenor of the Central & Western Concern Group