

30th August 2012

The Chairman & Members
Antiques Advisory Board
C/- AAB Secretariat
136 Nathan Road
Tsim Sha Tsui
Kowloon
Hong Kong

Dear Mr Chan and Members of the AAB,

I am writing in response to the invitation of the Antiques Advisory Board (AAB) for public views on the proposed grading of the site and individual buildings comprising the former Central Government Offices (CGO) located in Government Hill, Central District. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

As you know, at the AAB meeting held on 14th June 2012 the Board agreed to rate the entire former CGO site Grade 1, and the individual buildings Grade 1 for the East and Central Wings and Grade 2 for the West Wing.

I strongly urge the AAB to reconsider the Grade 2 grading and accord the West Wing a Grade 1 grading instead. I would also urge that the AAB recommends Monument Status to the Antiques Authority of the entire complex to ensure the ongoing protection of this important site in the history, government and society of Hong Kong,

It is extraordinary, and deeply unfortunate to my mind, that having graded the entire site Grade 1 that the AAB then decided to rank the West Wing Grade 2. The historical record indicates that the East, Central and West Wings were planned in the late 1940s by the Government Architects Office as a unified complex, responding to the topographical characteristics of the site and the desire to preserve views to the north from Government House located above Lower Albert Road. It is also a low-rise building complex which respects the setting of St. John's Cathedral, the Former French Mission Building and Government House, all of which are Declared Monuments.

I note the criteria listed on your website used in the grading deliberations by the AAB. These criteria comprise historical interest, architectural merit, group value, social value and local interest, authenticity and rarity and I would like to briefly address each of these below:

- **Historical Interest** – The West Wing comprising part of the CGO has been the Hong Kong seat of government from the 1840s until after the 1997 handover with the recent move of government functions to the new Tamar complex. The historical significance of the site and of all the current buildings (including the West Wing) is of the utmost historical importance for Hong Kong. Very few buildings in Hong Kong, particularly western buildings, share the historic continuity of use from the 1840s until the present day.
- **Architectural merit** – The West Wing is a fine example of a Hong Kong post war Modernist office / administrative building which responds elegantly to the sloping topography of the site and is the product of a thoughtful and rigorous design process. I refer you to the architectural analysis in *The Greatest Form has no Shape Three Exemplary Works of Hong Kong Modern Architecture* by Vito Bertin, Gu Daqing and Woo Pui-Leng on this important building, with which I concur.
- **Group Value** - As previously stated, the West Wing forms part of a complex of Modernist office / administrative buildings which was planned as a unified complex. Each wing of the complex was then built in stages by different architects working for the Government Architects Office, undertaking the detailed design process within the building envelopes established by the initial site design. As the AAB has agreed to grade the entire former CGO to be Grade 1, the West Wing should also be accorded Grade 1, as it contributes to the group value of the complex. Should a Grade 2 grading be affirmed by the AAB, with the likely subsequent demolition of the West Wing, then the significance and meaning of the Main and East Wings will be severely eroded. It also makes an utter mockery of the Grade 1 listing for the entire site.
- **Social Value and local interest** – The West Wing, comprising part of the CGOs possesses a very high social value and local interest. As the seat of Hong Kong government from the 1840s, decisions made by government in this complex affected all Hong Kong citizens, either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, it has been established that the Hong Kong Government Inquiry Service was established here in the 1960s and was an important location where citizens from all walks of life could interact with government. I am sure there are many older Hong Kong citizens who remember entering the West Wing for that purpose.
- **Authenticity and rarity** – The West Wing, and the other wings in the CGO complex are both authentic and rare in a Hong Kong context. The West Wing was used until 2011 as government offices and is still used for some government uses. It has not been used for any other purpose and therefore maintains its authenticity. The West Wing is also rare as it was the first government building on Hong Kong island designed in a strictly Modernist post-war style characterised by simple, unadorned facades treatments and bold massing. The only other building of its style and importance on Hong Kong island is City Hall by Ron Phillips and Alan

Fitch (1962), which is a declared monument. I would argue that the West Wing is equally significant as City Hall.

Although I acknowledge it is unlikely to be a consideration by the AAB in its deliberations I would like to point out the ramifications of retaining the Grade 2 grading for the West Wing. As you know, should the West Wing be confirmed as a Grade 2 building it will open the way for the government to demolish the building, which they have publicly stated to be their intention for several years. Demolishing the West Wing will have the unfortunate consequence of destroying the Modernist architectural composition of the CGO, which to my knowledge, is unique in Hong Kong for buildings of this age, historical significance and function. It would also degrade the cultural significance and meaning of the East and Central Wings and the site as a whole, which are all Grade 1, and undermining the intent of the AAB grading system for this site. The proposed high-rise office tower proposed for the West Wing site would also have a negative impact upon the setting of the former Government House, the Former French Mission Building and St. John's Cathedral, all Declared Monuments.

I urge members of the AAB to reconsider the proposed Grade 2 grading and accord the West Wing a Grade 1 grading instead.

I also urge that the AAB recommends Monument Status for the entire CGO complex to the Antiques Authority. This would guarantee protection of the site and also the unique qualities of the Government Hill as a whole.

Yours faithfully,

(signed)

David Parker