



Submission for public consultation re former CGO compound

to:

amo@lcsd.gov.hk

2012/09/01 上午 12:00

Hide Details

From: Katty Law

To: amo@lcsd.gov.hk

3 Attachments



CGO-submission to AAB-31Aug2012.doc 1949-CGO-plan.JPG ISC20c Toni Li CGO Hong Kong July 2012.pdf

Dear Sir/Madam,

Attached pls find my submission and two attachments.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Best regards,
Katty Law
Central & Western Concern Group



Re: Submission for public consultation re former CGO compound

to:

amo@lcsd.gov.hk

2012/09/01 上午 12:26

Hide Details

From: Katty Law

To: amo@lcsd.gov.hk

1 Attachment



CGO-submission to AAB-31Aug2012.doc

Please use this updated submission letter, the 2 attachments remain the same.

Thank you.

On Fri, Aug 31, 2012 at 11:59 PM, Katty Law
Dear Sir/Madam,

Attached pls find my submission and two attachments.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Best regards,
Katty Law
Central & Western Concern Group

Request to the Antiquities Advisory Board to accord Grade 1 heritage status to the former Central Government Offices (including the site and all buildings on it - namely the East, Central and West Wings) and to propose monument status for the CGO complex

The former Central Government Offices complex represents a significant layer in the history of Government Hill, an area which has been the seat of Hong Kong government for 170 years. In response to the need for an expansion of government services, the former CGO was conceived and designed in late 1940s early 1950s as one building compound to accommodate virtually all government departments in the territory, according to the Financial Secretary's speech dated 8 March 1950: "*there would be a greater degree of co-ordination in Government work, as instead of sometimes inadequate telephone conversations, officers would, without loss of time, be able to discuss problems face to face with representatives of the department concerned. The building of the new offices will meet a need which has long been felt. The block will stretch across the present Secretariat site from the Defence Force Headquarters on Garden Road, right through to Ice House Street. The offices will be built in sections, so that as the buildings now on the site are demolished, alternative accommodation will be available. The preliminary design for the new block is a pleasing one, but of course final drawings have not yet been made. The present proposal is that offices to which the public require most frequent access should be at the Ice House Street end, and that lifts should be installed to give access along the corridors to the offices at the Garden Road end.*" (Extract from the Financial Secretary's speech at Legislative Concil on 8 March 1950, HKRS156-1-1803)

(attachment 1: 1949 CGO plan showing the building compound was designed as a whole)

There is no justification to segregate sections of one building compound and grade them separately. The former CGO compound was constructed in a continuous sequence during the 1950s. The design is uniform in the modern functionalist style. Separate grading of sections within a clearly harmonious integral building compound is a violation of established grading practices of the AAB and will set a bad precedent for future grading exercises of both private and public properties. Comparable examples from the list of graded buildings, such as the City Hall, the Hollywood Road Police Quarters, each has multiple buildings/structures within the site and designed as an ensemble, were all given one grade and protected accordingly. It is difficult to understand why the West Wing, being a vital and integral part of the compound, was proposed a different grading from the other wings. Such differentiation between the parts is "*philosophically contradictory and ethically troubling*", according to the comment from three international conservation bodies including ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage, International Union of Architects and Docomomo International in their letter to HKSAR government dated 26 July 2012 (attachment 2). Such inconsistent grading will compromise the establishment of good heritage conservation practices in Hong Kong. The former CGO compound must be graded as a whole and the same grading (Grade 1) be given to all its integral and equally significant parts.

The Financial Secretary's statement highlights the importance of the Ice House Street section which was used as the public entrance into the entire CGO compound: the community's interface with the government. This is the only part of the entire CGO compound which can be seen from Queen's Road Central, it is where the government first made its presence, met and interacted with the public. It therefore played an important social role and reflected the government mindset in the 1950s to be more open to the public. Enquiry counters, claimed to be unique in Southeast Asia, were set up in the lobby of the West Wing to serve members of the community. This western section of the CGO housed offices of departments that were closely linked to the public and which the public required constant and easy access, such as the Inland Revenue Department, the Public Relations Office, the Urban Services Department, etc. It was where hawker licenses were issued, where taxes and water bills were collected; it was where the Urban Council held its meetings, and offices for Legislative Councillors where members of the public can visit to seek for assistance.

There was a small post office, a dental clinic and a public canteen on the 7th floor, the latter was used in late 1960s as the venue of public parties organized by the government. These parties originated from the need of the government to improve relations with the community after the 1967 riots and to provide “trendy” leisure activities to young people. All of the above show the historic, cultural and social significance of the West Wing. The proposed destruction of the West Wing would harm and diminish the significance of the entire compound by taking away the compound's most “public” section.

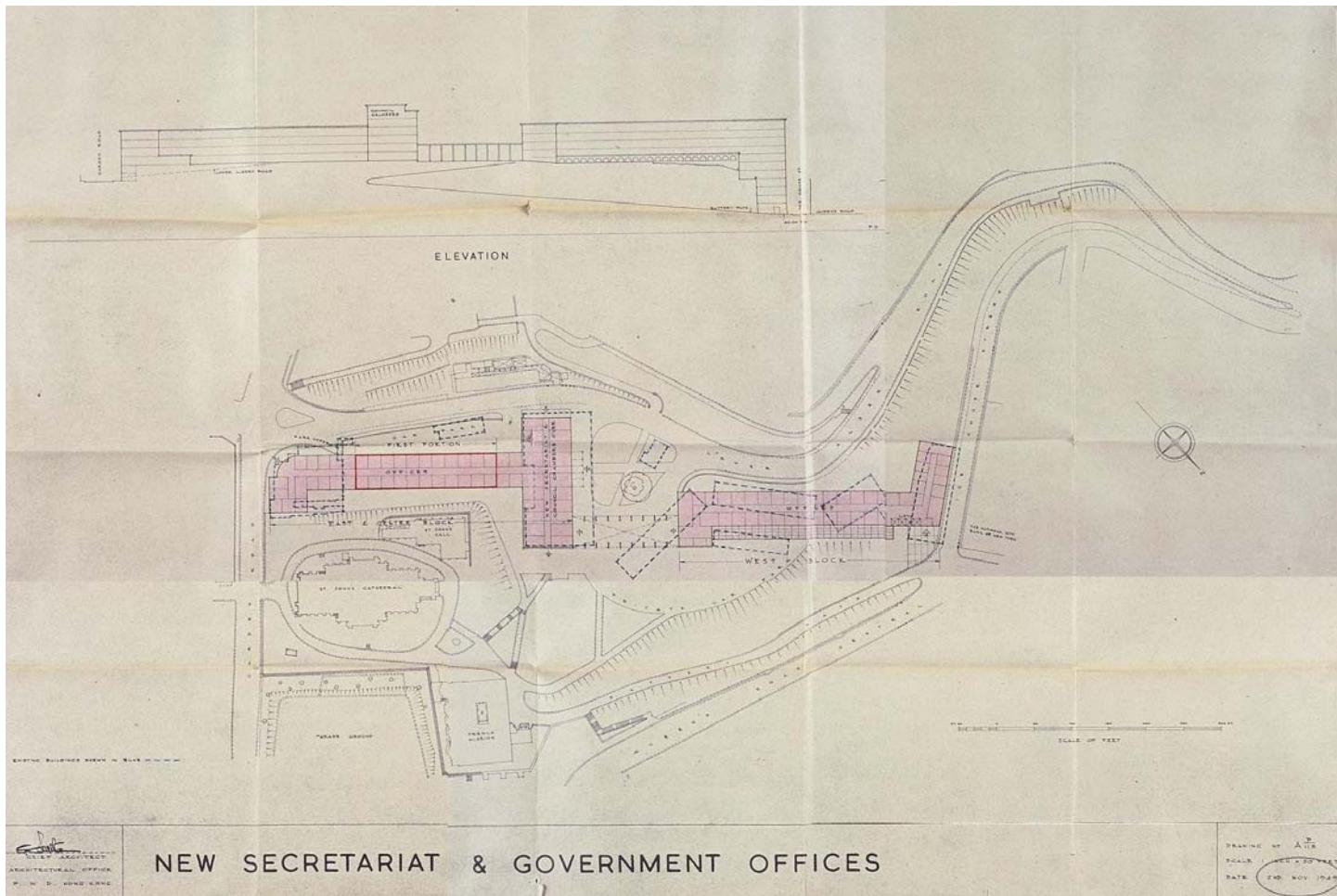
The former CGO compound not only embodies the governing philosophy of the Hong Kong government from the 1950s to the present, it is also a cumulation of a long governing tradition dating back to 1841. In short, it embodies the essence of Hong Kong government of the last 170 years. The designation of various functions to the East, Central and West wings (or sections) of the former CGO reveals a clear division of labour, showing the complexity of a government and how it related to its people. It witnessed the change of administration from a British colony to the present SAR government. The central space in between the wings, where public rallies were often held, witnessed the growth of the civil society through social actions. This physical presence of the entire CGO compound and the history behind must be respected and accorded a protection worthy of its significance. Hong Kong people and our future generations have a lot to learn from this heritage site, a place where our city's identity has grown and from where Hong Kong develops to be a member of the world's greatest international cities. With this in mind, the conservation of the former CGO provides a great opportunity for understanding the spirit of our unique city. The compound must therefore be protected as a whole together with other historic buildings on Government Hill within a **special conservation area**. I respectfully request the Antiquities Advisory Board to accord Grade 1 heritage status for the entire former CGO compound (the site and all the buildings on it) and to propose a monument status for the compound.

Submission by Katty Law, Central & Western Concern Group
31 August 2012

Reference

Interview with Michael Wright, chief architect of the former CGO compound
(www.governmenthill.org)

Heritage Alert issued by ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage
(<http://icomos-isc20c.org/id3.html>)



NEW SECRETARIAT & GOVERNMENT OFFICES

DRAWING NO. A18
SCALE 1/2500
DATE 2nd NOV 1948

26 July 2012

Mr Tony Li
Development Secretary
Hong Kong SAR Government
Office of the Chief Executive
Central Government Offices
Tamar, Hong Kong

By Email: ceo@ceo.gov.hk

Ref: Reply re redevelopment Central Government Offices West Wing

Dear Mr Li,

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the West Wing of the Central Government Offices (CGO). We appreciate the opportunity to continue the professional dialogue about this important heritage site.

We fully respect that Hong Kong has its own set of heritage rules and guidelines in the way it determines how culturally significant properties should be preserved and protected. The members of ICOMOS ISC20C, the International Union of Architects and Docomomo are professionals who assess and advise on such projects in their daily work all over the world, and we appreciate the diversity of processes and cultural practice that are applied. We have carefully reviewed your letter and the assessment reports prepared for the property and we must respectfully disagree with the conclusions that are presented.

Our analysis of the relevant documentation and our research confirms that the West Wing of the CGO is a vital and integral part of the whole CGO complex. Designed as one entity, the CGO is a demonstration of the concept of providing centralised government services and administration in a single accessible location, and it has proved to be adaptable and functionally relevant to date. The adaptive re-use proposals demonstrate the sustainability for further functionality of this type of building form and fabric for future generations.

The AAB assessment that rated the whole site Grade 1, Main Wing Grade 1, East Wing Grade 1, and West Wing Grade 2, also indicated that the site as a whole is the entity to be considered as heritage. The reasoning for a lesser grade 2 evaluation for the West Wing is not clearly reasoned, but, the Grade 2 evaluation in conjunction with the rest of the complex being all Grade 1 makes it clear that the West Wing building is vital to understanding the whole.

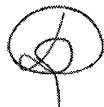
Using the definitions given related to the gradings: "Grade 2 status refers to buildings of special merit, efforts should be made to selectively preserve", and especially when viewed in conjunction with the rest of the complex which is all Grade 1, we respectfully suggest that such "efforts" should be strongly pursued. The CGO was conceived as a whole, designed as a whole and indeed built as a whole, though it was done in phases and with numerous people involved. The CGO has also functioned as a significant government complex for more than fifty years, serving the people of Hong Kong. Differentiating between the parts therefore is philosophically contradictory and ethically troubling.

The removal of the West Wing will not only be a great loss in its own right but it would significantly diminish the cultural value and meaning of the remaining buildings and site that make up the CGO complex. We acknowledge with enthusiastic support your government's plans to save and rehabilitate the Central Wing and East Wings. However, we strongly believe that just as the government has demonstrated that those two buildings can be successfully rehabilitated and given new life, a similar opportunity should be offered to ensure that the West Wing can continue to serve the people of Hong Kong. In that way, the entire CGO complex can retain its cultural value and meaning, its heritage values appreciated and celebrated by future generations.

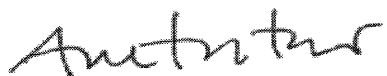
We ask you once more to re-consider further the opportunity before you to conserve and celebrate the heritage significance of the entirety of the Central Government Office complex.



Sheridan Burke
President, International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage



Albert Dubler
President, International Union of Architects, UIA



Ana Tostões
President, Docomomo International

Copies to:

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