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**Extract from the Report of the delegation of the  
Panel on Planning, Lands and Works on its duty visit in September 2002  
to study the experiences on town planning, urban renewal and  
heritage preservation in Singapore, Berlin and London**

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### **Heritage preservation**

2.31 In recent years, more and more people have become aware of the significance of preserving Hong Kong's rich cultural heritage resources. As pointed out by CE in his 1999 Policy Address, "it is important to rehabilitate and preserve unique buildings as this not only accords with our objective of sustainable development but also facilitates the retention of the inherent characteristics of different districts, and helps promote tourism. The concept of preserving our heritage should be incorporated into all projects for redeveloping old areas". The Commission on Strategic Development (CSD) also recognizes the importance of preservation of buildings, precincts and other features of historical and architectural significance as an important attribute for Hong Kong to become Asia's World City. To this end, a dedicated heritage preservation policy needs to be put in place.

2.32 At present, the legislation directly related to the preservation of historical buildings is the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53). It commenced operation in 1976 and provides for the declaration of historical buildings, among other things, as monuments. A total of 77 monuments (including 30 private properties) have been declared so far. The Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) has been set up to advise the Antiquities Authority (i.e. the Secretary for Home Affairs) on any matters relating to antiquities and monuments, including whether an item should be declared as a monument under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. The AAB also has an important role to play in supporting and guiding the work of the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The AMO identifies and records a wide range of heritage items, including historical buildings, historical stones, etc. It has also established three Heritage Trails in Hong Kong, namely the Central and Western Heritage Trail, Ping Shan Heritage Trail and Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail.

2.33 In March 2000, the Culture and Heritage Commission was established to advise the Government on overall policies and funding priorities in the development and promotion of culture and heritage. Its key responsibility is to formulate a set of principles and strategies to promote the long-term development of culture and heritage in Hong Kong. Moreover, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) is conducting a review

of the policy and related legislation on the preservation of historical buildings and sites which are in private ownership. The question of affording better protection to historical buildings and sites in private ownership will be addressed in the context of HAB's review.

2.34 As regards URA, it is required to implement the URS which provides that heritage preservation should be part of urban renewal, and that URA should preserve heritage buildings if such preservation forms part of its urban renewal projects. Preservation should include preservation and restoration of buildings, sites and structures of historical, cultural or architectural interest, and retention of the local colour of the community and the historical characteristics of different districts. As far as practicable, the preserved heritage buildings should be put to proper community, public or other beneficial use. The aim is that these buildings should be a living and functional part of the community and not mere historical artefacts for display. In this connection, URA has set up a Conservation Advisory Panel comprising members from other countries to assist in the development of preservation policy and practice. Conservation strategies for the target areas will be formulated.

### **The delegation's views**

2.35 Whilst appreciating the efforts made by the planning authorities in formulating long-term planning and development strategies for Hong Kong, the delegation considers that more emphasis should be placed on maximizing the use of existing resources, including the existing land, buildings, built heritage and waterfront areas, and identifying new development opportunities. In this connection, an integrated approach to cover urban renewal and heritage preservation in the town planning process should be explored. Moreover, more could be done to enhance public participation in the planning process to ensure that the development plan is able to cater for the needs of the people. Reference is made to the experiences of Singapore (Chapter 3), Berlin (Chapter 4) and London (Chapter 5) in these aspects.

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### **Heritage preservation**

3.36 The UR Authority's active involvement in conservation started as early as the 1970s with the rehabilitation of some state-owned properties for adaptive reuse. In 1989, it drew up a Conservation Plan mapping out the criteria and methods for conservation, so that areas and buildings can be sensitively restored whilst still retaining the spirit and ambience of historic places and buildings. To-date, it has gazetted over 5 600 pre-war buildings for conservation. Some two-thirds of them have been restored.

3.37 The UR Authority's role in conservation encompasses five areas, as follows:

- (a) To identify and recommend buildings of historical, architectural and cultural merits for conservation;
- (b) To encourage the private sector to participate in conservation programmes;
- (c) To provide the legal framework for conservation as well as documents/materials to guide owners and professionals in their conservation works;
- (d) To seek the views of professionals and owners of conservation buildings before deciding on policies and guidelines; and
- (e) To create a better understanding of conservation and shares with professionals and owners of conservation buildings the appropriate restoration methods so as to achieve quality restoration.

3.38 The UR Authority is now identifying more buildings for conservation. These include post-war buildings which are of significant historical and architectural merits. In this connection, the Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP) has been set up in June 2002 to give inputs to built heritage proposals put up by the UR Authority, as well as propose buildings for the UR Authority to study for possible conservation. The CAP also promotes greater public education and understanding of the gazetted built heritage. With 15 members who are professionals from the building industry, arts and heritage, education and journalism, and the Government, CAP enables the UR Authority to reach out to more people to disseminate and gather views.

3.39 In line with the effort to encourage quality restoration, the UR Authority has

launched the annual Architectural Heritage Awards since 1995 to recognize owners, professionals and contractors who have gone beyond the basic essentials to restore monuments and conservation buildings to their former glory for today's use. The Awards are open to all monuments and conservation buildings in Singapore.

### Conservation principle

3.40 In Singapore, the fundamental principle of conservation is "maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration and careful Repair" - the "3R"s. This principle has been applied in different degrees to the different groups of conservation areas taking into consideration the historical significance, the context of the surrounding developments as well as the long-term planning intention for each of the areas.

### Conservation areas

3.41 Most of the historic buildings in Singapore are found in the Central Area, in particular, Chinatown and Boat Quay. The delegation was given a guided tour of the Kreta Ayer and Bukit Pasoh Conservation Areas (Chinatown), Boat Quay Conservation Area (Photo 3.3) and Fullerton Building Conservation Area.

3.42 Being the largest of Singapore's historic areas, Chinatown developed over a century in four phases: Telok Ayer in the 1820s, Kreta Ayer in the 1830s, Bukit Pasoh in the early 1900s and Tanjong Pagar in the 1920s. Under a plan of the UR Authority to conserve Chinatown, these four places were given conservation status in 1989 and buildings of architectural and historical significance were retained and restored. In respect of the Kreta Ayer and Bukit Pasoh Conservation Areas, they contain two and three-storey shophouses mainly of the Transitional, Late and Art Deco Styles. Shophouses, an important building type in Singapore's architectural heritage, are narrow small terraced houses for business and living. Constructed between 1840 and 1960, these humble buildings are two to three-storey high, built in contiguous blocks with common party walls. The ground floor was used as shop space while the owners lived on the upper levels. While shophouses are conserved, commercial and/or residential uses are allowed for in these buildings. Most of the conserved shophouses are now used as shops, coffee houses and eating places.

3.43 The Boat Quay Conservation Area was also given conservation status in 1989. It was traditionally the centre of trading activities along the Singapore River. Its two and three-storey shophouses mainly of the Early, Transitional and Art Deco Styles which line the River are also conserved.

3.44 Located in the Downtown Core, the Fullerton Building sits on the historic promontory between the Singapore River and Marina Bay and at the edge of Raffles

Place, the dynamic hub of Singapore's financial community. Built originally as a fortress and subsequently became the home of the General Post Office and Government offices, the Fullerton Building was given conservation status in 1996. It was redeveloped as a hotel in 2001.

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### **Heritage preservation**

4.21 Although Berlin has undergone changes and suffered large-scale destruction in the past decades, much has been preserved, restored and expanded. The bulk of Berlin's monuments originate from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The processes of industrialization and urbanization in the last two hundred years, along with Berlin's development from the Prussian residence to the capital of the German Empire and ultimately, to the seat of the Parliament and Government, have left the most traces. The Berlin Regional Monument Authority (BRMA), which was reorganized in 1995, has recorded and preserved the historic building fabric throughout its 200-year-old existence. It has to ensure that any interventions made to the building fabric of historic monuments are limited to an acceptable minimum and, above all, to prevent demolition in the interest of the general public. There are around 8 000 listed historic monuments in Berlin.

#### Cultural historic monuments

4.22 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization declared in 1990 and 1999 two famous Berlin historic ensembles as world heritage sites: the Prussian palaces and gardens in Berlin and Potsdam, and the Berlin Museumsinsel (Museum Island). The Berlin and Potsdam world heritage site consists of harmonious ensembles formed by palaces and gardens built over hundreds of years under Prussian Kings. As regards the Berlin Museumsinsel, it has an architectural ensemble of five individual, harmoniously constructed museums of archaeological collections and art from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In view of the devastating effects of the war and the need to cope with the increased volume of visitors and the requirements of modern exhibition presentation, the island is to be extensively redeveloped in the next few years. The individual buildings are to be connected by a subterranean promenade which will be used for a general tour. A new entrance building is being erected parallel to the back of one of the museums.

4.23 Apart from the two world heritage sites, Berlin's protected cultural heritage includes individual buildings and structures from all epochs, such as the Brandenburg Gate and the Olympic Stadium. Situated at the main entrance to the city, the Brandenburg Gate is the landmark of Berlin. It was the grandest among a series of city gates built in Berlin at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century but is the only gate survived. The restoration of the Brandenburg Gate is the latest example of historic conservation in Berlin. It took almost two years to restore the Gate, using elaborate conservation measures and modern laser technology: 56 000 working hours were spent by stone masons replacing thousands of stone blocks, renewing joints and removing around 100 000 bullet holes from the Second World War.

4.24 The Olympic Stadium, which was officially opened at the Olympic games in 1936, is being refurbished in line with the listed building preservation provisions and at the same time, adapted to the requirements of a modern events arena. The Regional Monument Office, representatives of the track and field athletes, the relevant architects and construction companies have provided their input in the conversion plan. The emphasis is to preserve as much of the original substance as possible. Once the redevelopment work has been completed, the arena will hold 76 000 spectators. A new reinforced concrete roof, with a transparent membrane, is in striking contrast to the rigid tectonics of the historical stadium building. Two additional rows for spectators will be created by lowering the playing field by 2.65 metres. The Stadium will present its new, modern look for the final of the Soccer World Cup 2006.

Industrial historic monuments

4.25 Despite the destruction caused by the war and the demolition that took place during the course of reconstruction, there are still a considerable number of industrial monuments in Berlin. Large enterprises which turned Berlin into an industrial centre built their own districts, with their own factories, housing estates, infrastructure, parks and green spaces. Many of these areas have been preserved. For example, about half of the buildings in Berlin used by SIEMENS are listed as historic monuments. The works built between 1900 and 1960 are used by the company's manufacturing and development departments. Renovation and restoration are carried out in co-ordination with BRMA.

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## Heritage preservation

### English Heritage

5.50 The delegation visited English Heritage which is a public body with responsibility for all aspects of protecting and promoting the historic environment. Established in 1984 under the National Heritage Act 1983, English Heritage is the UK Government's principal adviser on all matters concerning the conservation of the historic built environment. It works in partnership with the central government departments, local authorities, voluntary bodies and the private sector to conserve and enhance the historic environment, broaden public access to the heritage, and to encourage people to understand and enjoy it. It is also responsible for the management, maintenance and repair of over 400 historic properties including Stonehenge on behalf of the nation. In addition, since its administrative merger with the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England on 1 April 1999, English Heritage is now responsible for compiling and maintaining the National Monuments Record as the national archive and information base of historic buildings and ancient monuments.

5.51 English Heritage advises the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. It also advises DCMS and DETR on decisions affecting the historic environment, and advises boroughs on planning applications affecting listed buildings. Buildings are listed in three grades — I, II\* and II, to reflect their relative architectural and historic interest. Grade I and II\* buildings may be eligible for English Heritage grants for urgent major repairs. In UK, all buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are listed, as are most those built between 1700 and 1840. In general, a building has to be over thirty years old to be eligible for listing. Listing currently protects about 500 000 buildings in UK (including 40 000 in London), 90% of which are Grade II.

5.52 In London, English Heritage works closely with GLA and contributes to the development of the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy. It also works with LDA on economic and social regeneration strategies that maximize the contribution of London's built heritage to the capital's economy. Moreover, it gives advice and guidance on the conservation and enhancement of London housing of all periods, based on recognition of its architectural qualities and potential, with the participation of the occupants. It also encourages innovative approaches to securing the best uses for historic buildings that are compatible with their historic character and fabric. For example, in respect of the Grade II\* listed Monsoon Building near Paddington Station, English Heritage worked with the owner and local planning authority to arrive at a scheme which provided modern day office space while preserving the outstanding architectural interest of the building. Apart from these, English Heritage also



co-ordinates the development and implementation of Management Plans for London's three World Heritage Sites: Westminster, Maritime Greenwich and Tower of London.

5.53 In 2001-02, English Heritage received government funding of £110 million and generated £33.3 million from its own activities, such as admissions to its properties, membership fees, retail and catering. In the same year, it spent a total of £65.2 million on conservation, including grants paid for the conservation of buildings and monuments, conservation areas, cathedrals, and archaeological projects, and £54.75 million on the historic properties under its management, and £11.7 million on education and public affairs.

#### Foreign & Commonwealth Office

5.54 The delegation also visited the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and was given a guided tour of the restored office building at King Charles Street. The building was completed in 1868 as part of the new block of Government offices which included the India Office and later the Colonial and Home Offices. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growing complexity of international affairs led to severe overcrowding within the buildings. In the 1960s, it was decided that the building should be demolished with completely new offices to be erected on the same site. However, financial constraints and public outcry which led to the offices being classified as Grade I listed building resulted in the rejection of demolition in favour of restoration. The rolling programme of restoration and refurbishment carried out between 1984 and 1997 not only brought the Fine Rooms and areas such as Durbar Court (Photo 5.4) back to life but produced 25% extra usable space for far less than the cost of demolition and rebuilding.

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6.1 To sustain Hong Kong's position as a world city in Asia, a strategic plan is essential to chart its long-term sustainable development. In this connection, the delegation observes that Singapore, Berlin and London, like Hong Kong, attach great importance to formulating such a strategic development plan. A common theme of the HK2030 Study, Singapore's Concept Plan, Berlin's Urban Development Plans and the draft London Plan is to achieve the sustainable development of the city and make it a better place for people to live in. To this end, the plans need to ensure that sufficient land, housing, transport and other facilities will be provided to accommodate population and economic growth, to combat urban sprawl and to achieve a green city.

6.2 The delegation considers that for a strategic development plan to be successful, it is essential for the planning authorities to:

- (a) identify development constraints;
- (b) maximize the use of existing resources (land, buildings, built heritage, waterfront areas, etc.);
- (c) identify new development opportunities;
- (d) cater for the needs of the people;
- (e) adopt a partnership approach to involve the public, professional bodies, interested parties and private sector in the planning process; and
- (f) adopt an integrated approach to cover urban renewal and heritage preservation in the town planning process.

### **Development constraints**

6.3 For Hong Kong, the major development constraints are the limitation of land resources and high population density. With 6.725 million people accommodated in 1 100 sq km, Hong Kong's overall population density is 6 250 people per sq km <sup>(Note 6.1)</sup>. However, the population densities for Hong Kong Island and Kowloon peninsula are 17 000 and 44 200 respectively. To plan for the development of such a densely populated place is a challenging task. The population densities will continue to rise with population growth, and yet the extent of future population growth is uncertain. The uncertainty mainly lies in the migration factor,

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(Note 6.1)

The population densities for Singapore, Berlin and London are 6 055, 3 794 and 4 668 people per sq km.

i.e. the level of immigrants from the Mainland. From 1997 to 2001, new arrivals from the Mainland admitted under the One Way Permit Scheme made up some 93% of the population growth in Hong Kong.

### **Development opportunities**

6.4 Options to address the development constraints need to be explored. While land reclamation is one option to increase the land supply in Singapore (The UA Authority estimates that future land reclamation can add 15% more land), it is not a desirable option for Hong Kong, as it goes against the wishes of the public to protect the Victoria Harbour. In fact, the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance (Cap. 531) provides that the Victoria Harbour is to be protected and preserved as a special public asset and a natural heritage of Hong Kong people, and for that purpose there shall be a presumption against reclamation in the Harbour.

6.5 As there is unlikely any substantial increase in land supply, consideration should be given to maximize the use of the limited existing resources. While Singapore and London go for intensification, the delegation considers it not a desirable option for the urban areas in Hong Kong, as it will make the city even more compact. Moreover, the delegation shares the public concern that tall developments are gradually taking over the skyline of the waterfront, blocking the visual corridors from hinterland to the harbour and views to the ridgelines. The delegation considers that the views of the ridgelines in Kowloon peninsula and Hong Kong Island should be preserved. It is therefore not in favour of vertical intensification.

6.6 The delegation however considers it a feasible option to make more effective use of the existing land, buildings, built heritage and waterfront areas. On the existing land, buildings and heritage, reference could be made to the following:

- (a) experiences in Singapore and Berlin for the redevelopment of old precincts or districts, such as the redevelopment of Toa Payoh and Prenzlauer Berg;
- (b) experiences in Singapore for the upgrading of the existing housing blocks/flats, such as the upgrading packages offered under MUP;
- (c) experiences in Berlin and London where redundant industrial land/buildings were changed to commercial or residential use; and
- (d) experiences in Singapore, Berlin and London where built heritage are turned into effective use while preserving the historical interest of the heritage.

6.7 As regards waterfront areas, the experience of transforming the Singapore River into a waterway providing waterfront housing, entertainment and dining facilities, the development of Rummelsburg Bay in Berlin and the development strategy for the Blue Ribbon Network (including River Thames) in the draft London Plan are useful references for enhancing the development of the waterfront areas of the Victoria Harbour. The delegation supports the concept of the development strategy for the Blue Ribbon Network that the developments on the waterfront areas should capitalize on the water as an asset to improve the quality of life of the local people. The delegation also considers that well-developed waterfront areas would enhance the attractiveness of Hong Kong and promote the tourist industry. In this connection, the views from and across the Victoria Harbour should be protected and reference could be made to the proposal on view management under the development strategy for the Blue Ribbon Network.

6.8 Apart from maximizing the use of existing resources, the delegation considers that new development opportunities, such as Opportunities Areas in the New Territories, should be identified. Reference could be made to the draft London Plan where Opportunities Areas have been identified on the basis that they are capable of accommodating substantial new homes or jobs.

### **Catering for the needs of the people**

6.9 As the strategic development plan is made for the Hong Kong people, it should be capable of addressing the needs of the people for housing, transport and other facilities. To make Hong Kong a better place to live in, the delegation supports streetscape greenery and skyrise greenery, such as those proposed under Singapore's Parks and Waterbodies Plan. It also supports the proposals under the draft London Plan to improve air quality by improving the integration of land use and transport policy and promoting sustainable design and construction, and to protect and promote open spaces.

### **Partnership approach**

6.10 The delegation supports the adoption of a partnership approach to enable the participation of the public and the concerned parties in the planning process. Whilst appreciating that the Government has conducted public consultation on its various planning studies, the delegation considers that large-scale publicity should be launched to promote public awareness, interest and participation. In this connection, the delegation observes that the exhibition on Singapore's Parks and Waterbodies Plan and Identity Plan is very informative and is able to attract public interest. Moreover, the idea of organizing a public dialogue with the Planning authorities in Hong Kong, such as the public dialogue with the Minister for National Development in Singapore on the Concept Plan 2001, could be explored.

6.11 Apart from public participation, the delegation also considers the participation of professional bodies in the planning process important. Planners, developers, architects and conservation bodies have their own important roles in town planning. The early involvement of these parties will ensure that plans will succeed with high quality of design and the best understanding of the environment. Moreover, the delegation considers that the International Panel of Architects and Urban Planners formed by the UR Authority should be a valuable channel to gather and share international inputs and global best practices on urban planning. The formation of such a panel in Hong Kong may also facilitate local town planning.

### **Integrated approach**

6.12 For a strategic development plan to be successful, the delegation considers that an integrated approach should be adopted. From the experiences in Singapore, Berlin and London, it is clear that the redevelopment of individual districts and the preservation of historic buildings/areas are an integral part of town planning. The objective is to achieve a harmonious blend of the old and the new in order to give the city a sense of cohesion, continuity and character. In Hong Kong, however, town planning, urban renewal and heritage preservation are conducted separately. To achieve more effective results, the delegation is of the view that the Government should consider adopting a holistic approach to ensure that the policies and programmes in these three areas are compatible with each other.

6.13 On heritage preservation, the delegation considers it highly essential for the Government to put in place a heritage preservation policy for the sustainable preservation of the heritage in Hong Kong. This is in fact the view not only of the delegation, but also of other Members of LegCo. At the LegCo meeting on 13 February 2003, a motion was passed to urge the Government to expeditiously formulate a comprehensive policy on heritage preservation so that relics of historical value can be duly preserved. From the experiences in Singapore, Berlin and London, the delegation observes that heritage is the cornerstone of their national identity and the bedrock of their tourist economy. As regards Hong Kong, much more should be done on heritage preservation. It will depend on the Government having the commitment to implement a comprehensive policy, public and private owners having the incentives to look after their buildings properly, and public and private sponsorship to support the preservation work. To encourage quality restoration, reference could be made to the launch of the annual Architectural Heritage Awards in Singapore to recognize the efforts of owners, professionals and contractors. Moreover, heritage education should be promoted to make the heritage accessible and enjoyable for all. The work of the English Heritage in this aspect is of useful reference.

6.14 As a whole, the delegation considers the visit to Singapore, Berlin and London very useful. Members of the delegation hope that the findings of the visit

would also benefit other Members of LegCo, the Government and relevant authorities, and the public.

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