



### 長春社 Since 1968

The Conservancy Association

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## The Conservancy Association's Position on Hong Kong's Built Heritage Conservation Policy

Heritage Buildings are crucial to a city's essence and character. When a heritage building is demolished, the loss is irretrievable. Hong Kong can never live up its name as Asia's World City if our cultural heritage is not well protected.

As for the current "consultation," it is badly conducted and shows a lack of sincerity by the government to truly review heritage policy. The current consultation should have been Stage 2 of the heritage review, Stage 1 having been conducted more than three years ago (February 2004). The current consultation should have been conducted on the basis of the result of the previous consultation. However, in terms of the questions asked and the views sought, there was no material difference in the way the current consultation is conducted from the previous one.

There were no reports or papers on the result of the Stage 1 consultation, and if there were, they were never published. In other words, the community's views as reflected in the 2004 consultation have been ignored.

In fact, the 2004 "first stage" consultation itself was not the beginning of the review of heritage conservation policy. The same issue was addressed by the Culture and Heritage Commission in its earlier consultation, culminating in the CHC report of 2003. That report was, again, ignored.

The report clearly stated in paragraph 6.3 that as a result of negligence of heritage conservation in the past, "many items in the collective memories of the Hong Kong people were erased." It seems that our collective memories were not the only things being erased, the Administration has also selectively erased its own memory.

The report also suggested that government departments and the Urban Renewal Authority should pay due consideration to cultural landscape in both the planning of new towns and the redevelopment of urban areas. The Administration should also formulate a policy to accord cultural use the highest priority in the use of historical buildings and the establishment a Heritage Conservation Board, which takes on wider responsibilities.

The Conservancy Association thinks those both natural and cultural heritage are invaluable social asset. We advocate the conservation of heritage buildings, as they help to shape our sense of identity, increase social coherence and cohesion and can enhance our cultural life.

Heritage conservation is also a matter of sustainable development and cross-generational equity. We do not have the right to deplete our natural or cultural resource, especially if they are non-renewable, to the detriment of our future generations.

We believe that a sound conservation policy is paramount in the protection of our heritage buildings. We would like to make the following suggestions:

1 Benchmark Hong Kong's heritage conservation policy with that of international standards:

This can be done simply by committing to accede to well-recognized charters and principles, of which we would propose three, namely:

- the Venice Charter (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites 1964),
- the New Zealand ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value,
- the "Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China

2 Improving the current regime

- Making more use of the Lord Wilson's Trust in heritage preservation projects;
- Devoting more resources to the Antiquities and Monuments Office and the Antiquities
- Advisory Board so as to speed up the task of grading and declaration of monuments;
- Introducing an administrative guideline to make it necessary for prior notice to the
- AMO to be given for any development proposal or building alteration to all post-war buildings;
- Historical buildings owned by the Administration should be managed by AMO
- Documenting all the history of all existing heritage/cultural sites of HK
- Developing some sort of statement of significance to guide after-use of existing or acquired heritage sites.
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3 Four New Tools for Heritage Conservation

Accordingly, we propose four new planning tools to enhance heritage conservation.

- (i) Introduction of new zonings, "sites of significant historical value," "sites of significant rural character," and "sites of significant cultural value" can be introduced into the planning system to define more clearly the heritage to be protected.
- (ii) Government resumption or buyout in exceptional circumstances.
- (iii) Public-private partnership-similar to the one in the New Nature Conservation Policy.
- (iv) Non in situ exchange - transfer of development rights through land-swap, extra plot ratio or monetization.

4 Deploy more resources to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and District Councils to promote heritage conservation.

5 A new Heritage Impact Assessment Bill modeled after Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance should be introduced.

6. Institutional reform

Forming a Conservation Authority to undertake various aspects of conservation duties currently performed by AMO, AAB and LCSD.

7. Heritage Trust

The Trust can be created as a public-private partnership, with both government and the private sector contributing to its start-up. Initially, the government should help persuade resource-rich bodies like the Jockey Club to contribute. Since government itself also has a responsibility towards conservation, a substantial contribution should be well justified, perhaps as a one-off grant rather than a recurrent expenditure. Another important source will be the private sector's contribution, especially by developers under other forms of private-public partnership.