
INFORMATION NOTE

Former Central School site at Hollywood Road

1. Background

1.1 The Central School has a history of well over one century. Originally located in Gough Street, it was established in 1862 as the first school in Hong Kong founded and totally funded as a government school¹. The Central School was also at that time the sole government Anglo-Chinese secondary school with due attention and emphasis on English education². Other subjects such as Algebra, Arithmetic, Chemistry, Geometry and Geography were subsequently introduced and added to the curriculum, in an effort to fill in the gap in the traditional pattern of education offered by vernacular schools run by the local Chinese community.

1.2 Many graduates of the Central School became prominent figures in Hong Kong and China. Among the exemplary graduates, Dr Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) gained admission to the Central School in 1884 and left in 1886 for higher education. Other dignities included the Hon Mr Ho Fook (1863-1926), Sir Ho Kai (1859-1914), Mr Ho Kom Tong (1866-1950), Sir Robert Ho Tung (1862-1956) and the Hon Mr Lau Chu-pak (1867-1922)³.

1.3 The Central School was renamed Victoria College in 1889 and, in 1894, Queen's College – a name that survives to this day. The location of the Central School has also changed over the period. The original school campus was established at Gough Street. It was later relocated to Hollywood Road in 1889, followed by another removal in 1950 to the present site at Causeway Bay.

1.4 The purpose of this information note is to provide the Subcommittee on Heritage Conservation with background information relating to the school site at Hollywood Road, in terms of its history, existing conditions, remnants of historic structures and re-development proposals.

¹ The Central School stood as the sole government secondary school in Hong Kong before the inauguration of the Belilios Public School in 1890.

² By 1865, English learning was made compulsory in the upper section of the Central School, while in the preparatory section English was taught as well. See Antiquities and Monuments Office (2006).

³ See Antiquities and Monuments Office (2006).

2. Site history

2.1 According to some studies⁴, the school site at Hollywood Road was originally the location of the "Shing Wong Temple", built in 1843 as one of the first temples in Hong Kong. The site was auctioned off in 1852 and the owner built 50 houses around the temple. After the owner died, the Government bought the land in 1876 to construct a new school campus for the Central School. In 1884, Sir George Bowen, the then Governor of Hong Kong, officiated the stone-laying ceremony for the new building and Dr Sun Yat-sen attended the ceremony as a student⁵.

2.2 The Central School moved in 1889 from its first home in Gough Street to the Hollywood Road site, which comprised a school campus and a playground fronting Hollywood Road. The school building was gutted by looters and damaged by fire during the Second World War⁶. It was demolished in 1948 to make way for the construction of two blocks of police married quarters. The police married quarters were opened in 1951 and have occupied the Hollywood Road site since then. The buildings have become vacant since 2000 when all the tenants moved out.

3. Existing conditions

3.1 The Hollywood Road site, which is about 0.6 ha in area, is bounded by Hollywood Road to the northeast, Shing Wong Street to the northwest, Aberdeen Road to the southeast, and Staunton Street to the southwest. Currently, the Hollywood Road site comprises three main platforms descending from Staunton Street to Hollywood Road. The central platform is supported by a retaining wall with a flight of steps linking the central and lower platforms.

3.2 The existing site contains vacant Government premises, namely two blocks of the former police married quarters on the central platform and a block formerly used as the Junior Police Call Club House on the lower platform. An existing courtyard is situated on the lower platform.

⁴ See Smith (1973) and Masterplan Limited (2007).

⁵ Dr Sun only attended the ceremony without studying at the Hollywood Road campus. He left the Central School in 1886, about three years before the opening of the Hollywood Road campus in 1889. See Masterplan Limited (2007) and Wikipedia (2007).

⁶ See Stokes & Stokes (1987).



The Hollywood Road site

Source: Planning Department (2007).

3.3 The existing site is surrounded by retaining/boundary walls along Hollywood Road, Shing Wong Street, Aberdeen Street and Staunton Street. There are a number of wall trees at the site along Hollywood Road and Shing Wong Street. In addition, there is a mature tree near the entrance of Aberdeen Street.

4. Remnants of historic structures

4.1 The school building of the former Central School at Hollywood Road was demolished in 1948. Nevertheless, the Hollywood Road site still contains architectural features of the old school campus, such as the retaining walls along the site boundary, granite pillars and plinths of the boundary walls and granite steps. In 2005, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department conducted an initial survey of the Hollywood Road site and identified the following historic structures:

Retaining wall along Hollywood Road

4.2 The retaining wall along Hollywood Road is of a type known as random rubble walling built of irregular unsquared stone not in courses. An important feature of the wall is a series of trees growing along the top of the wall. Due to their conspicuous position, the trees are highly visible and bestow a pleasant sylvan landscape to the area.



Retaining wall along Hollywood Road

Source: Planning Department (2007).

Retaining wall along Shing Wong Street

4.3 The wall fronting the steps of Shing Wong Street is similar in construction to the random rubble wall along Hollywood Road. The wall is stepped in several places to follow the inclination of the flight of steps.



Retaining wall along Shing Wong Street

Source: Planning Department (2007).

Boundary wall along Staunton Street

4.4 The boundary wall along Staunton Street consists of a rendered wall constructed of bays and intermediate pillars built on top of a random rubble retaining wall. While the original pillars and plinths have been preserved, the authenticity of the remaining part of the wall has been undermined by alterations over the years.



Boundary wall along Staunton Street

Source: Planning Department (2007).

Boundary wall along Aberdeen Street

4.5 This boundary of the site has walls constructed of several different types including random rubble walls and rendered walls of bays and intermediate pillars built to a stepped formation to suit the inclusion of Aberdeen Street. While the original pillars and plinths have been preserved, the authenticity of the remaining part of the wall has been undermined by alterations over the years.



Boundary wall along Aberdeen Street

Source: Planning Department (2007).

Flight of steps at Staunton Street

4.6 The flight of granite steps is built along the random rubble retaining walls on Staunton Street. There was originally a matching flight of steps, which was demolished for the construction of the police married quarters in 1948.



Flight of steps at Staunton Street

Source: Planning Department (2007).

Retaining wall and flight of steps on the lower platform

4.7 The flight of granite steps leading from the central platform to the lower platform near the frontage of the site at Hollywood Road is similar in construction to that at Staunton Street. There was originally a matching flight of steps but had been demolished to accommodate the Junior Police Call Club House. Although the retaining walls appear to remain intact, the dwarf wall with balustrades on top of the retaining walls has been replaced by the existing chain fence.



Retaining wall and flight of steps on the lower platform

Source: Planning Department (2007).

Assessment and preservation of the historic structures identified

4.8 According to AMO, the granite steps leading to the lower platform along with the remaining rubble retaining wall are areas of historic interest. In addition, the retaining walls along Shing Wong Street and Hollywood Road, along with the trees on them, are preserved with relatively high integrity and authenticity when compared with the boundary walls along Aberdeen Street and Staunton Street.

4.9 The above assessments were incorporated in the planning brief approved by the Metro Planning Committee of the Town Planning Board on 2 February 2007. The issue of the planning brief was in response to the decision made by the Metro Planning Committee on 25 November 2005 on a planning application for rezoning the Hollywood Road site from "Residential (Group A)" ("R(A)") to "Government, Institution or Community" ("G/IC"). While rejecting the application, the Committee decided that a planning brief should be prepared to address, among other things, the applicants' concern over the needs to preserve the cultural heritage and historical features of the Hollywood Road site.

4.10 The planning brief, as approved by the Metro Planning Committee, sets out the planning objectives, development parameters, planning requirements and design guidelines for the future development of the Hollywood Road site. It specifies, among other things, the following heritage preservation requirements when undertaking residential development at the Hollywood Road site:

- (a) the preservation of the existing retaining walls along Hollywood Road and Shing Wong Street (with trees on them) should be ensured as far as possible;
- (b) the preservation of the existing boundary walls along Staunton Street and Aberdeen Street should be ensured as far as possible, with the flexibility allowed for modifications to the walls and non in-situ preservation of the granite plinths and pillars for future development of the site, such as providing openings for vehicular and pedestrian access;
- (c) the lower platform within the site is to be preserved for use as public open space, while alterations are allowed to facilitate vehicle access via Hollywood Road;
- (d) the granite steps leading to the lower platform together with the remaining rubble retaining the wall should be preserved;
- (e) a minimum set back of 3 m from the historic structures should be provided;
- (f) the future developer is required to report to the Antiquities Authority (currently the Secretary for Development) upon discovery of any antiquities and supposed antiquities as defined in the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap.53) not specified above and to abide by the provisions for the protection of the antiquities according to Cap.53; and
- (g) the future developer should submit a conservation plan for the preservation and maintenance of the historic features and the antiquities discovered or to be discovered at the site to the satisfaction of AMO or the Town Planning Board.

Latest developments

4.11 The Antiquities Advisory Board held a meeting on 6 March 2007, at which AMO agreed to carry out an archaeological investigation to ascertain the archaeological potential of the Hollywood Road site. AMO's Field Archaeological Unit conducted the investigation during March – July 2007 on the upper platform (car park area) and the lower platform (the playground of the former Central School) of the site.

Assessment of the historic structures identified

4.12 According to AMO⁷, the original school foundation is partially preserved at the upper platform area. The alignment of the granite blocks of the foundation walls is basically in line with the layout plan of 1883, and generally reveals the configuration of the school foundation. However, as the school foundation has been considerably disturbed by the later construction works at the site, its value for aesthetic appreciation and academic research has been reduced, diminishing the overall heritage value to a degree that the total in-situ preservation cannot be justified. Nevertheless, AMO considers that a small portion of the school foundation should be preserved intact for integrating into the future development of the site subject to technical feasibility and the interface with the development project.

5. Re-development proposals

5.1 The Hollywood Road site was rezoned in 1998 from "G/IC" to "R(A)" on the Sai Ying Pun and Sheung Wan Outline Zoning Plan. In 2001, the Government included the Hollywood Road site in the 2001-2002 Application List for open application by the developers. However, the land sale was subsequently put on hold, and it was not until 2005 that the Government decided to include the Hollywood Road site again in the 2005-2006 Application List. The planning brief approved by the Metro Planning Committee in February 2007 has further specified the use of the Hollywood Road site for pure residential development, with a maximum plot ratio of eight for building two residential blocks.

5.2 The possible sale of the Hollywood Road site has all along attracted considerable community concerns over the preservation of historic structures at the site. For example, the Town Planning Board received two applications to rezone the Hollywood Road site from "R(A)" to "G/IC", one in 2005 and the other in 2007. The development of the Hollywood Road site took a new turn in October 2007, when the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region announced in his 2007-2008 Policy Address that the site would be removed from the Application List for a year to invite proposals on its revitalization.

⁷ See Antiquities and Monuments Office (2007b).

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