

## INFORMATION NOTE

### Relocation of the Court of Final Appeal to the Site of the Former Legislative Council Building

#### 1. Background

1.1 In October 2011, the Legislative Council ("LegCo") moved to the new Tamar site, and its former building in Central will be converted into the Court of Final Appeal ("CFA").<sup>1</sup> The former LegCo Building ("the Building") was accorded with a Grade 1 historic building status in 1980 while its exterior was declared as a monument in 1984.

1.2 The Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services ("the Panel") held a meeting on 27 June 2011 to discuss, among other things, the appointment of serving Justices of Appeal as non-permanent judges of CFA. During the deliberations of the issue, the Chairman asked the Judiciary about the plan for the usage of the Building after its handover to the Judiciary. The Judiciary Administrator replied that the Judiciary planned to relocate CFA to the Building. As such, the Chairman requested the Judiciary Administrator to report to the Panel on its plan to use the Building in the next legislative session.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The conversion project will restate the original function of the former Legislative Council Building ("the Building") as a law court. The Building used to house the Supreme Court until 1978, when the construction work of the Mass Transit Railway led to cracks in the structure and the subsequent closure of the Building for reinstatement works. In 1983, the Executive Council approved the plan to convert the Supreme Court Building into the home of LegCo, and the conversion project was completed in October 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Similar question was also raised by the Finance Committee during its examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013 (see *Replies to Initial Written Questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013. Session No. 11*).

1.3 In response, the Judiciary Administrator wrote to the Panel on 14 November 2011 to update it on the relocation of CFA to the Building.<sup>3</sup> The Judiciary Administrator stated that the Architectural Services Department ("ArchSD"), being the works agent of the relocation project, had started to conduct the necessary Heritage Impact Assessment ("HIA") and building condition surveys. The target was to complete these surveys and obtain the approval of the HIA report from the Antiquities and Monuments Office ("AMO") within the first half of 2012. ArchSD would also work on the detailed design of the proposed facilities for the future CFA in the Building, on the basis of the Judiciary's requirements and with due regard to the advice in the HIA report as approved by AMO. It was scheduled to complete the conversion works by end of 2014 so that the relocation of CFA could take place in the first half of 2015.

1.4 The Panel has scheduled to further discuss the relocation of CFA to the Building at the meeting to be held on 10 July 2012. To facilitate members' deliberations, this information note will make reference to the HIA report<sup>4</sup> and summarize the information contained herein on the cultural heritage value of the site of the Building, the conservation objectives and conservation policies governing the conversion works, and recommendations for forthcoming conversion works and post maintenance works.

## **2. Cultural heritage value**

2.1 Cultural heritage value encompasses all the values or meanings that a place may have to people beyond its functional values. These values refer to historical, architectural, aesthetic, social or other relevant values for past or present generations, and include its likely values to future generations.<sup>5</sup> The site of the Building is culturally significant for the following reasons:

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<sup>3</sup> See Judiciary Administration (2011).

<sup>4</sup> The HIA report was published in May 2012 assessing the heritage value of the entire Building and developing the conservation policies needed before, during, and after the completion of the relocation of CFA to the Building.

<sup>5</sup> In 2009, the then Chief Executive announced the relocation of CFA to the Building after the removal of LegCo to its Tamar Complex. When announcing the decision, the then Chief Executive mentioned of the indispensable role of the Building in the political, social and cultural history of Hong Kong. See GovHK (2009).

- (a) historic value – serving as the places for the legal and justice centre of colonial Hong Kong and the highest law-making organisation for almost a quarter century;
- (b) architectural value – being the prominent example of a neo-classical building built at the most prominent place in Central;
- (c) social value – providing the arena for a number of social and political discussions that were influential to the development of Hong Kong when housing LegCo; and
- (d) authenticity and rarity – being one of the very few remaining neo-classical buildings in Hong Kong and having its original fabrics<sup>6</sup> (especially the exterior) kept to a large extent.

### **3. Conservation objectives**

3.1 In view of the cultural significance of the Building, the HIA report sets out basic conservation objectives to be adopted for the future conversion works.

#### External conservation objectives

3.2 According to the HIA report, the building exterior should be preserved and restored entirely. Those original building materials and places which are recorded as Character-Defining Elements<sup>7</sup> ("CDEs") and with cultural significance should be handled in a conservative manner. In addition, any new alternation or addition should not impair the heritage value and cause visual distortion to its classic manner.

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<sup>6</sup> Fabrics mean all the physical materials of the place, including components, fixtures, contents and objects.

<sup>7</sup> Character-Defining Elements are those architectural elements and features that contribute to the unique character of a historic building.

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### Internal conservation objectives

3.3 Those recorded CDEs, and building materials and places that are culturally significant should be preserved in the future conversion works. In addition, places and building materials suspected to be of historic interest unearthed by modern fittings should be investigated thoroughly, conserved and retained by incorporating into new design.

3.4 Furthermore, the structural integrity and safety of the existing buildings should be enhanced and ensured by means of appropriate restoration and upgrading in the conversion works. Installation of new services and facilities to meet current building safety standards and to improve comfort is allowed, and yet such installation should not impair the cultural significance of the internal fabrics.

## **4. Conservation policies**

4.1 The HIA report suggests a set of guidelines for planning and designing future conservation works for the adaptive reuse of the Building for CFA. The guidelines cover, among other things, building fabrics, new additions and alternation works to the existing structures, provisions of new services, integration between old and new building fabrics, and the external area.

### Building fabrics

4.2 The whole exterior of the Building should be kept intact by preserving its original outlook and building setting. It is also recommended to adopt a minimal intervention approach to the key architectural features that contribute to the character and heritage value of the Building. These features should be retained as far as possible to maintain the architectural merits of the historic building.

### New additions and alternations

4.3 New structures for meeting current building safety codes, universal access for disabled, and/or accommodating new services are allowed if they are done at less obstructive locations, and locations not affecting the exterior or the internal areas identified with cultural values. The new additional works/structures should be of compatible design with and distinguishable from the existing building fabrics, and such additions should be reversible without causing any unnecessary damage to the existing building fabrics when being removed in future.

### Provision of new services

4.4 New services such as electrical, fire and ventilation services and installation which are unavoidable can be housed in the Building. Nevertheless, they should be carefully arranged and installed to minimize unnecessary damage to the existing building fabrics and impair the integrity to the building layout and areas with historic significance.

### Integration between old and new fabrics

4.5 The new construction should be set away or detached from the existing structures as practical as possible; and at where new materials interface with the old fabrics, they should be distinguishable from each other. Such an arrangement is to conserve the heritage value of the preserved historic building fabrics while making new additions or related new construction of compatible design.

### External area

4.6 The existing open setting in front of the Statue Square and Jackson Road section on both sides of the Building should be preserved as far as possible. The existing natural landscape around the site and historic background of the place such as the history of the Statue Square and evolutionary change of Central District should be respected if any future modification or improvement work will be done in these areas.

## **5. Recommendations for forthcoming conversion works and post maintenance works**

5.1 Apart from setting out the conservation guidelines to preserve the exterior and interior fabrics of the Building, the HIA report puts forward the recommendations governing the forthcoming conversion works and post maintenance works.

### Recommendations for forthcoming conversion works

5.2 The HIA report recommends that a conservation management plan should be formulated before starting site work. The plan is to be prepared by a qualified heritage conservation consultant with the objective of providing a guideline for all the conservation works, the corresponding preservation issue, time line, methodology, long-term protection, and management and maintenance of the historic building. The conservation management plan can also take the references and recommendations listed in the HIA report.

5.3 In addition, precautionary actions and measures should be taken right before and during the conservation works to ensure that the historically significant fabrics and elements are under suitable care and protection under site work. These measures include:

- (a) recording and documentation of (a) the existing exterior and interior of the Building, and (b) the conservation works before and after the carrying out of the works for AMO's record;
- (b) adequate protective measures for all the loose artifacts and decorative elements before and during conversion works; and
- (c) regular site supervision and monitoring by qualified site supervisors experienced in historic building projects.

### Recommendations for post maintenance works

5.4 In the future building management, the staff responsible for overseeing the routine maintenance and repair works shall either receive training or have experience in building, building operation and service management relating to historic buildings. The suggestions, recommendations and the identified CDEs mentioned in the HIA report should also be extracted to form (a) a set of guidelines for future staff to understand the values of the site, and (b) the guiding principle for management and maintenance purpose.

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## References

1. GovHK. (2009) *Press Releases: CE announces relocation of CFA to LegCo Building (with video)*. Available from: <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200904/16/P200904160185.htm> [Accessed July 2012].
2. Judiciary Administration. (2011) *Letter dated 14 November 2011 updating the Panel on the relocation of the Court of Final Appeal*. Paper submitted to the Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services of the Legislative Council for information. LC Paper No. CB(2)312/11-12(01).
3. LWK Conservation Ltd. (2012) *Heritage Impact Assessment for the Former Legislative Council Building (Old Supreme Court Building)*. Available from: [http://www.amo.gov.hk/form/HIA\\_report\\_Former\\_LegCo\\_Bldg.pdf](http://www.amo.gov.hk/form/HIA_report_Former_LegCo_Bldg.pdf) [Accessed July 2012].
4. *Minutes of Meeting of the Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services of the Legislative Council*. (2011) 27 June. LC Paper No. CB(2)515/11-12.
5. *Replies to Initial Written Questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013. Session No. 11*. Available from: [http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/fc/fc/w\\_q/ja-e.pdf](http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/fc/fc/w_q/ja-e.pdf) [Accessed July 2012].