



20 June 2016

To:

Members of the Panel on Development, Legislative Council
Mr Paul Chan, Secretary for Development & Antiquities Authority
Mr Jose Yam, Commissioner for Heritage
Mr Andrew Lam, Chairman of AAB (and all AAB Members)
Mr Susanna Siu, Executive Secretary, AMO
Mr Victor So, Chairman, Urban Renewal Authority
Ms Bernardette Linn, Director of Lands
Mr David Yip, Chairman of C&W District Council

Dear Sir/Madam,

市區重建威脅重要中環古屋遺蹟
要求原址保育彰顯中環發展歷史

Important Central heritage threatened by URA redevelopment
Call for in-situ preservation to celebrate the history of Central District

The Central & Western Concern Group would like to urge for your immediate and urgent attention to the historic tenement house remains in Cochrane/Gutzlaff Streets, Central, which are currently threatened by the Urban Renewal Authority's H18 redevelopment project.

Latest research findings by the Central & Western Concern Group have confirmed the historical significance of the site as the oldest and only surviving remains of back-to-back tenement houses in Hong Kong, with historical links to important citizens including Douglas Lapraik, James Bridges Enidcott, Ng Akew (Hung Mo Kew紅毛嬌), Ho Tung and Ho Kom Tong. The Central & Western District Council, in its meeting on 19 May 2016, expressed great concern about the conservation and in-situ preservation of the historical remains. The Antiquities Advisory Board, in its meeting on 18 April 2016, directed the Antiquities and Monuments Office to conduct further detailed study of the site and its report will be published in due course. The AAB Chairman and Members also stated that meetings would be arranged with the Concern Group as well as the URA to discuss the subject matter. The Legislative Council public complaints office and the Ombudsman have also taken up the Concern Group's complaint and are currently investigating this case.

Despite all these new findings and the concerns raised by various public bodies, the URA still refused to pay attention to the site's historical significance - by making reference to a flawed AAB "decision of no grading" (see below), the URA insisted on demolition and fake-preservation. In its 2 June 2016 letter to the Central & Western Concern Group, the URA said it will only "integrate some of the building remains in good condition in the future public open space." This means that the URA will dismantle the heritage structure and only

keep some of the remains. Please bear in mind that the historic structure is an integral structure made up of interconnecting series of back-to-back brick and stone walls and party walls of 10 tenement houses which will be shattered by such dismantling, and the non-in situ and piece-meal keeping of some bricks and stones is meaningless as it will take the heritage away from its original context.

This ill-treatment of our heritage is a total contravention of conservation principles including The China Principles and a clear disregard of procedural justice. The so-called "no grading by AAB" at the 3 March 2016 AAB meeting was a result of insufficient and misleading information provided by the AMO representative and this is now being investigated by the Ombudsman and LegCo. The AAB has also decided to revisit the case as more and more information has been unearthed which proves the site's significance. It is totally unacceptable that the URA uses a flawed excuse for removing the heritage structure.

We urge Mr Paul Chan, the Secretary for Development who is also the Antiquities Authority to safeguard this special heritage property of Hong Kong. The Lands Department should not grant this site to the URA because the URA has failed to recognise the site's heritage significance and may harm the heritage property. We also ask the Central & Western District Council, the Legislative Council and the Antiquities Advisory Board to urgently look into this matter and to secure proper assessment, grading and in-situ preservation for this site, with input from the Concern Group and the public.

As promised by the AAB Chairman at the AAB meeting on 18 April 2016, the AAB will meet the Central & Western Concern Group to hear the Group's presentation of the heritage findings. The Central & Western District Council has also committed to ensure that this heritage site is properly conserved. The conservation of this important heritage requires collaboration between the government, the district and legislative councils, the AAB, the URA and members of the public. There is great potential to conserve this site in-situ at the heart of Central to celebrate the history of this area. The heritage structure is located at the future public open space of the redevelopment project and to preserve it in-situ is totally feasible, and we can find many similar cases in China and other countries. We cannot risk losing another important heritage in Hong Kong.

We also urge the Legislative Council to review our heritage conservation policies in view of the fact that many heritage sites have been wrongly designated for urban renewal. We notice that many places of historical significance, such as the historic Street Market in Central 中環嘉咸街卑利街露天市集 and the historic Nga Tsin Wai village 衙前圍村 are now threatened by URA redevelopment projects. It is clear that tighter conservation measures must be put in place for such heritage sites instead of handing them to the URA for redevelopment. It is highly unfortunate that these sites are now adversely affected by urban renewal. More has to be done by the government to ensure that those remaining heritage properties are not further damaged.

The Concern Group will be happy to meet government officials, members of district and legislative councils, the URA, the AMO and the AAB to discuss this matter. Thank you for your kind attention.

Your sincerely,

Katty Law
for and on behalf of Central & Western Concern Group