

Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development

**Submission to Meeting 9 October 2007 from Nicholas and Margaret Brooke,
Professional Property Services Group**

Thank you for this opportunity to express our views on the Recommendation Report of the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District and the way forward for the WKCD project.

We welcome the proposals to develop much needed venue spaces for a wide range of arts and culture activities, but are concerned that there are to be so many concentrated in one district and under one overall authority. One of the key conditions for a vibrant and innovative arts and culture environment is the ability for artists and performers to grow in a diversified and open atmosphere. There certainly needs to be a supportive framework and access to adequate facilities and funds but concentration of venues and performances in one place, under one overall management authority, does not appear to us to be the ideal way to encourage a broad based interest in and enjoyment of the arts throughout the community and this is surely the best foundation for the development of an active and exciting arts and culture scene in Hong Kong.

The construction of major new venues of international quality in a park-like setting on the harbourfront (we support the maximum overall plot ratio of 1.81 proposed for the district as well as the height limit of 100m) will, of course, generate interest and may well attract a range of productions of all sorts to the city which could not have otherwise been accommodated but will these productions attract audiences from across Hong Kong or simply those living in Central and Kowloon? How will we fill all the venues contemplated? Where is the depth of talent to fill these venues when overseas productions are not on stage and where is the local management experience and expertise? Putting everything in one place is efficient but does it really meet the needs of Hong Kong as a whole?

In addition to the creation of the WKDC, we would like to see venues, display and performance centres dispersed across Hong Kong, not necessarily in new, purpose designed buildings but, as in other cities, in converted warehouses, disused police

stations and heritage structures which offer spaces no longer required for their original use. Funding could be made available for conversion and to support local groups wishing to put on productions or displays and we would prefer to see some part of the HK\$19 billion currently contemplated for West Kowloon to be allocated for this purpose. These facilities, embedded as they would be in the local communities who would be their target audiences, would enjoy the benefit of local transport and food & beverage facilities – unlike WKCD which will have to develop these as well – in addition to helping to develop a bottom up arts and culture scene in the city. The experience gained in managing these proposed district based venues would also be invaluable when WKCD eventually comes into operation.

We certainly see the need for five or six major new venues to provide facilities for both traditional and popular arts and culture and these should also incorporate smaller theatres and performance spaces to cater to a wide range of events. These need to be independently and professionally managed in so far as programming is concerned and productions need to be of top quality in order to justify the expense of development. However, in our view, the 15 venues proposed for WKCD are too many and yet, in the overall context not enough - we need fewer large scale structure and a much wider range of smaller district based venues, where both professional and community arts and culture events can be accommodated, either individually managed or managed as clusters by qualified venue managers and supported by a level of funding to convert and operate the individual venues and meet overheads for a period of time until they can become self sufficient.

We continue to be concerned over the issue of connectivity and the integration of WKCD with the rest of Hong Kong. So far Hong Kong has failed to ensure that people, be they residents or tourists, rather than vehicles enjoy easy access to the waterfront and to the facilities on it. It is over one kilometre from one end of the West Kowloon peninsula to the other and the challenge of accessibility and the movement of large numbers of people should not be underestimated.

Finally, the membership of the proposed Authority will require careful consideration as it needs to be made up of the relevant experts and interest groups. Whilst the approach is an interesting and indeed bold experiment which could and perhaps

should be extended to other sensitive areas of the harbour, such an authority should not be used as an occasion to reward “friends of Government”. The membership needs to be independent and pro-active but above all should care about the sustainability and cultural development of Hong Kong.