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Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 23 April 2012

Planning and development of M+

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the planning and development of M+ in the West Kowloon Cultural District ("WKCD"), and summarizes the views and concerns of the Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project ("the Joint Subcommittee") on the subject.

Background

2. In September 2003, the Government launched the "Invitation for Proposals" ("IFP") for developing WKCD. IFP specified a cluster of four museums with four themes (i.e. moving image, modern art, ink and design) and an art exhibition centre as mandatory requirements of the WKCD project. After IFP was discontinued in February 2006, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region appointed the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District ("the Consultative Committee") in April 2006 to re-examine the need of the core arts and cultural facilities for WKCD.

3. In May 2008, the Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development ("the Subcommittee"), which was established under the House Committee in the Third LegCo to study and follow up issues relating to the development of WKCD, received a briefing from the Administration on its proposed establishment of M+ in accordance with the recommendation in the Consultative Committee's Recommendation Report issued in June 2007. The mission of M+ would *"focus on 20th and 21st century visual culture, broadly*

defined, from a Hong Kong perspective and with a global vision", and "with an open, flexible and forward-looking attitude", M+ would aim to "inspire, delight, educate and engage the public, to explore diversity and foster creativity". Given the breadth of visual culture, it was proposed that design, moving image, popular culture and visual art (including ink art) would be the four initial broad groupings for M+.

4. In its Report issued in June 2008, the Subcommittee raised concerns about the M+ project and set out a series of markers for its planning and development. The relevant extract of the Report is in **Appendix I**. The Administration's response to such concerns and markers is in **Appendix II**.

5. In June 2009, the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority ("WKCD") advised the Joint Subcommittee of its establishment of a Museum Policy and Management Services Department under the Chief Executive Officer of WKCD to undertake the M+ project. In June 2010, WKCD appointed Dr Lars Nittve as the Executive Director of M+, and he took up his post in January 2011.

6. On 30 December 2011, WKCD submitted the Development Plan ("DP") for WKCD for the Town Planning Board ("TPB") for consideration. Once TPB agrees to gazette the DP for public inspection, WKCD will proceed with the competitive process of the architectural design of M+ and execute the work plan of M+ and related activities. According to WKCD, M+ (Phase I) will open after 2017 with more than 40,000 sq m floor area, of which 20,000 sqm will be exhibition space. WKCD has proposed that M+ (Phase II) will be completed beyond 2020.

7. According to WKCD, to make the necessary preparatory work for M+, an interim M+ possessing similar functions as the permanent M+ although in a much smaller scale during the interim period would be established. The interim M+ would be a platform for training of professional staff and providing arts education to the public. It would also conduct research and build up collection with a view to laying a foundation for M+. On 19, 21 to 24 January 2012, M+ launched its first pre-opening programme, viz. M+ Bamboo Theatre Exhibition and M+ Bamboo Cinema, in relation to the Cantonese opera performances staged in the West Kowloon Bamboo Theatre on the future site of the Xiqu Centre in WKCD.

Past discussions

8. The Joint Subcommittee discussed the planning and development of M+ at its meetings on 14 April and 19 June 2009 and 11 July 2011. Members' views and concerns are highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

Museum collections

9. Members expressed hope that M+ would attach importance to its collections rather than hardware and raised concern about whether M+ would need a lot of money to procure art pieces and how it would co-operate with existing public museums managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD").

10. According to WKCDA, \$1.6 billion had been reserved for the purchase of collections for the first five years up to the opening of M+. This allocation was quite good as a start-up. M+ would try to open up dialogues and build up trust with existing collectors worldwide, who might be looking for a home to display their collections or might donate their collections to M+. M+ had not commenced acquiring arts works, as its governance structure was still being worked out and the M+ team was working on the acquisition plan expected to be finalized during autumn 2011. In addition, WKCDA had met with the curators in Hong Kong museums to explore collaboration and opportunities. WKCDA considered that it was possible to borrow arts works from public museums based on trust and formalized collaboration, but M+ would be mindful of the need to avoid repeating existing exhibits in LCSD museums and careful about the use of its funding. WKCDA had also met with stakeholders, including artists, writers, critics and collectors, and was aware that there was a strong consensus on what M+ would stand for.

Freedom of expression

11. Concern was raised about whether the art works of certain artists, such as Mr AI Weiwei, would be prohibited at M+ owing to political considerations. Members generally considered that M+ should enjoy and preserve freedom of expression. Members also hoped that as M+ would be developed as a museum of its time and place, it should preserve the independence of artists and encourage them to express their ideas about Hong Kong frankly. The Executive Director of M+ should be outspoken and independent, and should he feel any explicit or implicit political pressure, he should voice out. M+ should also have a forward-looking vision and be receptive to different views and avoid being tied up in red tape.

12. WKCDA stressed that the whole basis for the future success of M+ was Hong Kong's freedom of expression. There would be no interference with the contents of exhibitions at M+ as well as other public museums in Hong Kong. The existing Executive Director of M+ had been directors of three most respected museums in the world, and would not ruin his career by being perceived as someone who compromised freedom of expression. Apart from time and financial constraints in taking forward M+, WKCDA had not felt any pressure in formulating its visions and contents, among others.

Progress of M+

13. Members were concerned about the progress of M+ and hoped that the design competitions for M+ and other landmark facilities in WKCD would be launched as soon as possible. They also called on WKCDA to organize activities (such as exhibitions) to introduce the concept and vision of M+ to the public. According to WKCDA, M+ would provide a unique opportunity to do something different. Dr Lars Nittve was the right person to take M+ forward and had great support from the artistic community. After the submission of DP to TPB, WKCDA would focus on developing M+ collections, building connections with the public and private museums in Hong Kong, and organizing a range of activities on the WKCD site to enhance public understanding of what M+ would be in the next few years. In addition, holding design competitions for a number of arts and cultural venues, including M+, was a critical part of the WKCD project. Details of such competitions, which would be open to local and overseas designers, would be made public soon.

Relevant papers

14. A list of the relevant papers with their hyperlinks at LegCo's website is in **Appendix III**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
18 April 2012

**Report of the Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development
("WKCD") on Phase III Study to the House Committee
(issued on 20 June 2008)**

Extract from Chapter VI - Conclusions and the way forward

Careful planning for M+

6.18 On museum facilities in WKCD, the Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development ("the Subcommittee") remains doubtful of the prospect of the 43 365 m² M+ in becoming the kind of visual culture institution with the international standing it has aspired to achieve especially during the first few decades of its operation. The Subcommittee notes that the M+ concept, which aims to provide an interactive platform to inspire, delight, educate and engage the public, encourage dialogue, interaction and partnership, explore diversity and foster creativity and cross-fertilization, has not been fully tested in current public museums. The Administration intends to provide the space to facilitate non-conventional display of "visual culture", which includes not only visual art (such as installation, painting, photography and sculpture), but also architecture, design (such as fashion, graphic and product design), moving image (such as film, video and television) and popular culture (such as advertising and comics). The Subcommittee considers that there is a market for the development of visual culture, but the success of M+ does not only lie in what it brings to the public but how to make it happen.

6.19 The Subcommittee shares the concern of some deputations that the entire M+ proposal is still at the conceptual stage. Bearing in mind that M+ would amount to a substantial increase by 52% of the total space provision of all the existing public museums in Hong Kong, and that its total capital costs will amount to \$4.749 billion and 78% of the operating deficit of WKCD will come from M+, there is a need for M+ to proceed in a more cautious manner. Given that the international status of a museum can only be built up over time, the provision of a net exhibition space of 16 000 m² in Phase I may be on the high side. Consideration should therefore be given to whether the implementation of M+ could be deferred until sufficient experience has been built up or be further phased to allow for a more progressive implementation timeframe.

6.20 The Subcommittee is aware that the Administration has no intention to downsize M+ or further phase its implementation. The Administration remains confident that M+ would proceed as planned so long as they could hire the right curatorial team and they could make use of the rich collection on visual culture (over 62 000 items) already acquired and currently kept by Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD"). The Administration insists that further downsizing would hinder the development of M+ into a world-class contemporary cultural and arts institution, making it difficult to realize its vision.

6.21 The Subcommittee is gravely concerned that notwithstanding the huge sum of money injected into the building infrastructure and exhibits, the patronage of M+ might be far below FA's estimates, and in turn it would be even more difficult for M+ to build up its status as a world renowned museum facility. The Subcommittee recognises that the engaging of an international operator to operate M+ so as to benefit from the collection and brand name of these international operators may not be consistent with the "Now" and "Hong Kong" perspectives of M+. Nevertheless, co-operation and partnership with overseas and Mainland institutions would effectively raise M+'s international status in particular in the early years of its establishment and this in turn may help in its long-term growth. Need for building a competent curatorial and management team for M+

Need for building a competent curatorial and management team for M+

6.22 The Subcommittee is not convinced that there is no scope of trying out the new curatorial concept in existing museums facilities. The Subcommittee is rather perturbed by the Administration's explanation which implies that the "innovative" approach of M+ is far beyond the reach of the curatorial expertise and experience of the existing museum professionals engaged by LCSD. The Subcommittee does not consider it sensible to entrust such a huge project entirely in the hands of a head curator no matter how competent he/she is. It is important that this head curator is supported by a large team of competent professional and managerial staff who share the same vision, who know Hong Kong and who are prepared to work under a sound corporate system.

Need for integration with the LCSD museum staff

6.23 The Subcommittee considers that the local museum professionals, the majority of which are engaged by LCSD, should not be marginalized in the course of planning and developing M+. Future co-operation will be extremely difficult especially when M+ needs to make use of the 62 000 items of collection in visual culture currently kept by LCSD. Besides, it would be a waste of public resources if there is no integration between M+ and other public

museums, and no sharing of experience and expertise between their staff. It will be for the good of Hong Kong's long-term development if the museum staff in LCSD and other local museums are exposed to the same kind of curatorial culture in M+. In the circumstances, there should be some established arrangements to facilitate secondment of suitable LCSD staff to the interim M+ so that it can have the first core team to test out the M+ concept at the earliest opportunity and speed up the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

Markers for the planning and development of M+

6.24 Having set out the above observations and concerns, the Subcommittee would like to state its position that it supports the development of a flagship museum facility with a focus on the Hong Kong perspective as this would be conducive to developing WKCD into a cultural hub in the Pearl River Delta or even the Asian region. The Subcommittee is also keen to see the success of M+ and would invite the Administration and the future WKCD Authority ("WKCDA") to give attention to the following matters in taking forward the M+ proposal –

- (a) the Administration should explain to the general public in an easily comprehensible manner what M+ is meant to be, before starting to design and build the M+ infrastructure;
- (b) the Administration should make the optimum use of the interim M+ in North Point not just as a training ground for future staff of M+ but as a temporary exhibition centre for public viewing and for testing out the M+ concept in a smaller scale;
- (c) the Administration should ensure full co-operation between M+ and the existing museums under the management of LCSD by promoting staff integration, such as staff attachment programmes, and putting in place contractual arrangements over the borrowing of collections from existing museums;
- (d) the Administration should encourage current local curatorial staff to take on the new challenges in M+ instead of relying entirely on curators coming from overseas as they may not understand the "Hong Kong perspective" as much as local curators;
- (e) the future WKCDA should conduct more extensive consultation with the

museum community before proceeding to establish the management board of M+ and recruiting the M+ staff;

- (f) WKCDA should not adopt Design-and-Build mode of development for constructing M+ and should conduct a design competition if the iconic effect of M+ is crucial to the attraction of quality collections in future; and
- (g) to enhance M+'s position as the major museum icon in Asia, M+ should also work closely with museums in the Mainland as well as those in the Asian region to facilitate exhibition of important collections from these places.

Source:

Report of the Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development on Phase III Study to the House Committee

(http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr04-05/english/hc/sub_com/hs02/reports/hs02-rpt080620-e.pdf)

Appendix II

Extract from the summary of concerns raised by LegCo Members in the Third LegCo in relation to the West Kowloon Cultural District project and the Administration's response

(D) Development of M+

Issues/suggestions raised by LegCo Members	Administration's earlier response	Administration/ West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's response (as at 7 September 2009)
(1) Separate design and construction contracts for iconic facilities such as the M+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Kowloon Cultural District Authority ("WKCD") would have the flexibility to decide on the procurement approach for the arts and cultural facilities in West Kowloon Cultural District ("WKCD"). According to the Financial Adviser, even though the design and construction of the facilities were procured in two independent contracts, there would not be significant difference in the construction cost estimates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The major consideration for the architectural design of the museum should be the functions of the museum and the activities to be held there. The curator of the museum, once on board, would draw up well-conceived plans for M+ and consider the most appropriate option.
(2) Downsizing M+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M+ would be developed in two phases to tie in with the overall development of WKCD. As the scale of M+ would be comparable to that of world-renowned museums, further downsizing would hinder the development of M+ into a world-class contemporary cultural and arts institution, making it difficult to realize its vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An on-going consultancy study on market analysis of the museum commissioned by the Authority would ascertain through market researches the existing and potential audienceship/ clientele of the museum. Based on the findings of the study, the Authority would critically examine the appropriate phasing of development of the museum.

Issues/suggestions raised by LegCo Members	Administration's earlier response	Administration/ West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's response (as at 7 September 2009)
<p>(3) Use of the Interim M+ in North Point as a training ground for future staff of M+ and a temporary exhibition centre for public viewing and for testing out the M+ concept in a smaller scale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Museum Committee ("MC") established under the WKCDA Board to start preparatory work of M+ did not recommend the site at Oil Street in North Point for setting up the Interim M+ as the original building at the site was too small. If a new building was to be built for setting up the Interim M+, it would be necessary to demolish an existing building next to it and to deal with the land contamination issue so arising. MC would continue to explore other locations and agreed that the Interim M+ should organise activities in different areas of Hong Kong to promote the concept of M+ to the public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of the Government and the Authority briefed the Members of the Joint Subcommittee on the feasibility of using a site at Oil Street in North Point for setting up the Interim M+ at the Subcommittee meeting held on 27 February 2009. The Authority considered the site not suitable for setting up the Interim M+ because the size of the original building at the site was too small. And if a new building was to be built for setting up the Interim M+, it would be necessary to demolish an existing building next to it and to deal with the land contamination issue so arising. • The team of experts to be recruited by the Authority would come on board by the end of 2009 or early 2010. They would be responsible for organizing activities in different areas of Hong Kong to familiarize the public with the concept of "M+".

Issues/suggestions raised by LegCo Members	Administration's earlier response	Administration/ West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's response (as at 7 September 2009)
(4) Building up collections for M+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major museums managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD") had in place a very rich collection on visual culture which amounts to more than 60 000 items of exhibits. There should be ample room for M+ to make use of these collections in store. The initial capital of \$1 billion assumed by the Financial Adviser would help to build up collections commensurate with the status of M+ upon its opening in 2015. WKCDA would enrich the collection of M+ in an on-going manner with its own financial resources and other sources of funds available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It took a long time to build up the museum's collection, which should be expanded step by step in accordance with the goal and the direction set out for the museum. The upfront endowment provided by the Government had already included a sum of \$1 billion for building up M+'s initial collections upon its commissioning and an annual collection budget of \$20 million thereafter as well. In addition, museum's collection could be obtained from donation and subscription. M+ could cooperate with individual art galleries, collectors and artists to borrow collections for short-term exhibition use.
(5) Collaboration between M+ and museums in the Mainland as well as those in the Asian region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WKCDA would establish links and network with museums in Asia and other parts of the world to explore future cooperation opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M+ would work closely with museums as well as arts and cultural circles from different regions by organizing exhibitions, exchanges and seminars. These activities would not only provide a platform for the artists to showcase their works but also presented an opportunity for the citizens to appreciate the arts and cultures of other regions.

Issues/suggestions raised by LegCo Members	Administration's earlier response	Administration/ West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's response (as at 7 September 2009)
<p>(6) Arrangement for ownership of collection of M+</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ownership of M+'s collections, obtained through donation, acquisition or any other means, should rest with WKCDA. To ensure proper protection of the collections of M+, WKCDA might, when establishing M+ and its governing structure deal with the ownership of the collections of M+ through the making of by-laws which would be subject to LegCo's approval. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The upfront endowment given to the Authority included the provision for the initial collection and the annual collection budget thereafter for the M+. Since the construction of M+ and collection purchase were paid out of public money, it would be necessary that the Authority should handle the ownership matter with care so as to ensure proper use of public resources and protected public interest. The Authority would consider the findings of the consultancy study on the mode of governance of the museum and make reference to the practices of similar overseas museums in dealing with the ownership issue of M+'s collections.
<p>(7) Co-operation and integration between M+ and the existing museums under the management of LCSD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government would work closely with the WKCDA and establish links in various aspects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museums managed by the LCSD would collaborate with M+ and explore different levels of collaboration.

Issues/suggestions raised by LegCo Members	Administration's earlier response	Administration/ West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's response (as at 7 September 2009)
<p>(8) Long-term plan for the development of curatorial professionals in parallel with the development of M+</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Administration undertook to advise members on the existing number of curatorial staff in Hong Kong, the manpower project, requirements and training plan for curators to complement the scale and themes of M+. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HAB had started the preparation for the Manpower Mapping Study on the Arts and Cultural Sector. It planned to commission the manpower mapping study in the second half of 2009 for completion in 2010. The findings of the study would shed light on the needs of the arts and cultural sector for all sorts of talents. The Authority would also draw up appropriate plans for the manpower needs in different areas for the WKCD facilities to tie in with the manpower requirement when the construction of WKCD facilities were completed.
<p>(9) Public education on M+ and consultation with the museum community before proceeding to establish the management board of M+ and recruiting the M+ staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WKCDA would engage the arts and cultural sector to gauge their views (in particular the concerned museum organisations) on the planning and development of the museum facilities in the WKCD to ensure that facilities and operation of the museum could meet their needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Authority conducted public education campaigns and consultation exercises at different stages of development in order to gauge the views of the public and stakeholders through different channels. This was to ensure that their needs were taken care of and considered at different stages of development and planning.

**Relevant papers on
Planning and development of M+**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development	---	Report of the Subcommittee on West Kowloon Cultural District Development on Phase III Study to the House Committee
Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project	13.1.2009 Item II	Agenda Minutes
	27.2.2009 Item II(a)	Agenda Minutes
	14.4.2009 Item II(b)	Agenda Minutes
	19.6.2009 Item II(c)	Agenda Minutes
	7.9.2009 Item II	Agenda Minutes
	16.4.2010 Item II(b)	Agenda Minutes
	29.3.2011 Item II	Agenda Minutes
	11.7.2011 Item I	Agenda Minutes