

Key Views of the Public Consultation Exercise on the Proposed Hong Kong Palace Museum Project and the Response by the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

An independent Consultation Consultant, Consumer Search Group (CSG), appointed by the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCD), has prepared a report on the public consultation exercise on the proposed Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM) project and provided an analysis of the feedback and views collected (Report). The Report concluded that there were more supporting than opposing views to the proposed HKPM project across different consultation channels:-

- **public opinion poll** through on-street face-to-face interviews;
- **questionnaires** collected at the City Gallery in Central where the proposed HKPM project details were on display and conducted via the WKCD website where the proposed HKPM project details were uploaded;
- **views expressed at the consultation activities** that WKCD organised or took part in; and
- **written and other submissions** from the public.

Having regard to the key views expressed during the public consultation exercise as highlighted in the Report, WKCD has prepared a series of responses to these views set out below:

General Views

- Many respondents in support of the proposed HKPM project believed that the development of the proposed HKPM would benefit the cultural development of Hong Kong and attract more tourists to Hong Kong.

WKCD's Response

Adding a second major museum to the WKCD will enhance the cultural offering to the public and greatly increase the District's attractiveness as a cultural destination. Focusing on traditional Chinese culture, the proposed HKPM will add to the District's diverse mix of activities to enable it to attract people of all ages and backgrounds, both locally and internationally. Also taking into account the historical and artistic value of the collections of the Palace Museum and its successful experience in developing cultural and creative products, it is anticipated that the proposed HKPM will become a popular destination for visitors. For reference, the Palace Museum attracted a record 16 million visitors in 2016.

- Some respondents concerned about the resources spent in building the proposed HKPM.

WKCDA's Response

The proposed HKPM project has been made possible thanks to a generous donation of \$3.5 billion by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (Trust) which will be used to fund the capital cost of the proposed HKPM.

- A few respondents mentioned that Hong Kong does not need the proposed HKPM as there were already a lot of museums in Hong Kong.

WKCDA's Response

Each of the museums in Hong Kong is unique in its focus and has particular intent and content. Since the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) signed a collaborative agreement with the Palace Museum in 2012, exhibitions have been co-organised almost every year to display the rich diversity of the Palace Museum's collection. These temporary exhibitions have been very well received by the public with a total attendance of over 420 000 people. Yet, only a small part of the Palace Museum's collection can be showcased at these theme-based exhibitions in LCSD's museums and only for a short period of time (usually three months).

Through the close collaborations between LCSD and the Palace Museum, it is clear that exhibitions of the Palace Museum's collections are a major attraction to local residents and tourists. However, none of the existing museums in Hong Kong could allow the long-term display of the Palace Museum collections in a comprehensive and in-depth manner due to their space constraints and the need to cater for a diversified range of exhibitions (covering traditional Chinese, Hong Kong and Western art and culture) throughout the year.

The establishment of the proposed HKPM in Hong Kong to showcase the best and most valuable artefacts from the world renowned collection through a long-term loan arrangement with the Palace Museum will be a major attraction to both the local community and visitors to Hong Kong. The proposed HKPM will be a unique cultural facility as the proposed arrangement with the Palace Museum is unprecedented in terms of the duration and number of artefacts and the percentage of grade one relics on loan to museums outside the Mainland.

- A few respondents stated that people could simply and easily go to Beijing to visit the Palace Museum if they would like to enjoy the exhibits and artefacts.

WKCD's Response

The Palace Museum is renowned for its vast holding of over 1.8 million artefacts, including paintings, ceramics, calligraphy, and antiquities belonging to the imperial collections. However, due to its huge collection and exhibition space constraint, only a small percentage (0.6%) of this extraordinary collection is able to be displayed to the public on site at any given time.

The proposed HKPM is not a branch of the Palace Museum but an independent museum in WKCD. As such it will have its own curatorial staff and take a unique approach to the artefacts, presenting works differently and most importantly contextualising them for Hong Kong audiences. It is worth noting that one of the reasons why the Palace Museum has expressed interest in collaborating with WKCD in developing the HKPM is its appreciation of the curatorial presentation by Hong Kong professionals and the interactive approach adopted in exhibiting the Palace Museum's treasures.

- Some respondents expressed views on whether or not the proposed HKPM should be built in WKCD.

WKCD's Response

WKCD is the single most important cultural investment in Hong Kong, driven by the vision to develop the 40-hectare waterfront site into an integrated arts and cultural district with world class facilities, to provide quality programmes with a must-visit appeal, and to nurture artistic talent. This vision is reflected in the Planning Themes and Design Principles of the Development Plan which states that "the WKCD is to be developed into a world-class integrated arts and cultural district comprising local, traditional as well as international elements, to enrich the arts and cultural life, to create job opportunities and benefit the tourism industry, and to make Hong Kong an international cultural metropolis". Development of the proposed HKPM within the WKCD is entirely in line with the vision and positioning of the WKCD project.

- Some respondents expressed views on perceived lack of transparency and public consultation on the development of the proposed HKPM project.

WKCD's Response

It should be emphasized that WKCD has conducted a full and proper consultation on the proposed HKPM project. It has considered all the returns of the public consultation exercise conscientiously and with an open mind.

WKCD has repeatedly explained the special circumstances that required confidentiality at the early stages of the proposed project, before the concept could be presented to the public for consultation. Many artefacts of the Palace Museum's exquisite collections are national treasures classified as grade one relics, and the loan of artefacts to other museums outside the Mainland on a long term basis (i.e. arrangement for the export of cultural relics) is subject to stringent regulations and restrictions. Under the current practice, the number of artefacts on loan to a museum outside the Mainland (including museums in Hong Kong) is normally limited to 120 pieces/sets and the loan period is normally limited to about three months. The loan of almost 1 000 pieces/sets of invaluable artefacts of the Palace Museum collections to Hong Kong for long term display is unprecedented. A prerequisite to taking forward the proposed HKPM was the need to obtain the support of the relevant Mainland authorities for the lifting of the relevant state restrictions. Without the support of the relevant Mainland authorities, it is not possible for either WKCD or the Government to take forward the proposed HKPM project on its own.

Furthermore, both the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation with the Palace Museum on 23 December 2016 (MOU) and its contents require the approval of the relevant Mainland authorities. This is also the first step for establishing the feasibility of developing the proposed HKPM project in WKCD. Prior to the signing of the MOU, WKCD would not have any basis for announcing the proposal unilaterally or undertaking public consultation for the proposal.

Upon the signing of the MOU, WKCD immediately engaged the public. The undertaking of this consultation exercise fully satisfies the statutory duty of WKCD to consult the public. During the public consultation exercise, members of the public were able to express their views on the proposed project freely through different channels, including filling in questionnaires at the exhibition at City Gallery in Central or on the WKCD website.

Through various consultation channels, WKCD gauges the public's views on both the proposed HKPM project overall, and also specific elements of design, programming, learning and interpretation. Responses received show that respondents overwhelmingly offered opinions on both aspects. WKCD is satisfied that the consultation exercise had produced a reliable measure of public sentiment about the proposed HKPM project. Support for proceeding with the proposed HKPM outstripped opposing views across all consultation channels.

WKCD has conducted a three-stage public engagement exercise between 2009 and 2011 to hear the views and opinions of the general public and the arts and culture sector for preparing the Development Plan of WKCD. In 2015, WKCD carried out a public engagement exercise on the Park and public open space. Now, a public consultation exercise on the proposed HKPM project has just been completed. WKCD will continue to engage the public through appropriate means regarding the development of the District.

- Some respondents expressed concern over the selection process for the design consultant of the proposed HKPM.

WKCD's Response

In view of the very tight development timeframe, the experience and expertise required, the WKCD Board approved the appointment of Rocco Design Architects Limited (RDA) as lead consultant for the proposed HKPM project on 28 November 2016. Since the proposed HKPM project was subject to public consultation and pending approval by WKCD, no contract has been entered into with RDA in relation to the appointment to date. On 25 January 2017, RDA was issued a letter of comfort stating that it would be paid for the work done, but expressly reserving the right of either party not to proceed with a full contract for the lead consultancy. RDA was asked, and agreed, to perform some necessary interim work on an on-account basis, which it has done. All of these steps were in strict compliance with WKCD's rules on tendering and procurement.

According to industry practice, there are various ways to engage an architect, including invited or open competition, restricted tender, open tender and direct appointment. All of these methods or appointments produce successful projects with excellent architectural designs.

Direct appointment of an architect is not uncommon in Hong Kong and elsewhere. It is usually done for special projects that are complicated and/or are sensitive. Accordingly, the method of engaging an architect is subject to the special conditions of the individual project. There is no one size fits all approach.

- A few respondents suggested that the public consultation exercise should make more information available and allow sufficient time and sufficient opportunities for the public to express views.

WKCD's Response

The eight-week consultation exercise fully meets all relevant requirements under the WKCD Ordinance. The consultation struck the right balance between giving

clear and adequate information about what was being proposed at the conceptual stage of the project, while leaving matters sufficiently open for respondents to give *their* views about the HKPM proposal in general and on detailed matters such as design, programming, learning and interpretation. While some respondents expressed concerns regarding the arrangement for the consultation exercise, the consultation yielded a large body of meaningful and thoughtful responses which have proven valuable to WKCD in considering the next step in relation to HKPM.

During the public consultation period, an exhibition introducing the project was presented at the City Gallery in Central and an online exhibition on the project was also presented on the WKCD website. Members of the public were invited to fill in a questionnaire to give their views on the different aspects of the proposed HKPM project in person at the City Gallery or online through the WKCD website. With the support of RDA, WKCD further presented the proposed internal layout and spatial design concepts of the proposed museum starting from 15 February 2017. To allow the general public and stakeholders more time to offer their views on the proposed HKPM project generally, and in relation to the additional details on the proposed internal design, the public consultation was extended by two weeks to a total of eight weeks and ended on 8 March 2017.

WKCD's Consultation Panel is an important channel for gathering public opinion. During the consultation period, two special meetings of the Consultation Panel were held to gauge views of the Panel members on the proposed HKPM project. WKCD also organised five consultation sessions for major stakeholders - two of them tailored for the professional bodies in the architectural, engineering, landscape, planning and surveying fields; another two for the arts and culture sector; and one for the Chairmen and Vice-chairmen of the arts and culture-related committees of the 18 District Councils. Apart from these sessions, WKCD also participated in panel discussions and talks organised by local professional groups, professional institutions, the Board of Travel Industry Council, the Task Force on Harbourfront Developments in Kowloon, Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing of the Harbourfront Commission as well as a session organised by The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups. WKCD also briefed the Chairmen and Vice-chairmen of the 18 District Councils on the proposed HKPM project at a regular meeting arranged by the Home Affairs Department.

In order to reach out to more members of the public and collect their views on the proposed HKPM project, WKCDA took the further step of commissioning a territory-wide public opinion poll from 28 February to 7 March 2017. The poll covered the Hong Kong resident population aged 15 or above. Quota sampling¹ was adopted to ensure that the enumerated samples represent an appropriate composition of the target population.

- WKCDA is perceived by some as a body only to be involved in the promotion of local art and culture and thus they claimed the proposed HKPM should not be developed in WKCD.

WKCDA's Response

WKCD is committed to facilitating and enhancing cultural exchange and cooperation among Hong Kong, the Mainland and beyond, and to enhancing the appreciation of a diverse and pluralistic range of the arts as set out in the WKCDA Ordinance (Cap. 601). According to the Planning Themes and Design Principles of the Development Plan approved in January 2013, WKCD is to be developed into a world-class integrated arts and cultural district comprising local, traditional as well as international elements. In the three-stage public and stakeholder engagement exercise undertaken at the time of preparing the Development Plan of WKCD, views were expressed that elements on Chinese culture should be included within WKCD. The inclusion of the proposed HKPM is in line with these views.

The development of the proposed HKPM will add to the diverse mix of cultural activities to enable the WKCD to attract people of all ages and backgrounds. Sitting across the Art Park from M+, the proposed HKPM will contrast well with M+'s positioning as a museum of 20th and 21st century visual culture, allowing visitors to explore in close proximity the contemporary and the ancient. The proposed HKPM will also complement the traditional cultural offering of the Xiqu Centre at the eastern end of the District. The Xiqu Centre will present traditional Chinese culture through performance and the proposed HKPM through the presentation of artefacts and artworks.

¹ The quota was set with reference to the corresponding population figures as at the third quarter of 2016 provided by the Census and Statistics Department, including (i) age, (ii) gender, (iii) highest educational attainment and (iv) working status.

Specific Views on Operations

- There were suggestions on the museum design such as facade materials, interiors and energy efficiency of the building, as well as in relation to accessibility, connectivity, and facilities in the proposed HKPM, etc.

WKCDA's Response

Design consultant RDA takes into consideration all the suggestions when preparing the design of the proposed HKPM. For example, many members of the public requested adequate queuing facilities and a separate entrance for group visits. These requirements have already been reflected in the revised design of the proposed HKPM.

- Many respondents demanded audio guides, mobile applications and interactive programmes.

WKCDA's Response

WKCDA has already designed and developed award winning mobile app (digital guide) to engage audiences and enhance the customer experience at its events and exhibitions. WKCDA is now developing the virtual reality experiences for the Xiqu Centre and M+ and undertaking detailed research into audio guides. WKCDA will also look at doing this for the proposed HKPM.

- There were suggestions on internships.

WKCDA's Response

WKCDA has already stated that the proposed HKPM project will provide huge opportunities for the development of home grown talent in the areas of curation, conservation and education. The proposed HKPM project will offer training opportunities and internships to ensure that the proposed HKPM can nurture and develop the right professional staff, and the creation of job and learning opportunities for young people in Hong Kong. WKCDA already runs successful internship schemes for M+ and the performing arts and a similar approach will be taken for the proposed HKPM.

- There were some suggestions on guided tours tailored to the public, youth and visitors with special needs.

WKCD's Response

Every exhibition held within WKCD includes a programme of tours for the public. Audio descriptions and sign language interpretation are available for tours at our exhibitions upon request. There are also guided tours tailored to schools and teachers, as well as the elderly and the disabled. Similar arrangements will be made available for the proposed HKPM.

- There were a few suggestions on admission fees (free, special rate or special waiver).

WKCD's Response

WKCD will consider the issue of entry fees for all its venues ahead of their respective opening. We anticipate that there will be a range of charges including concessions and free admission to different venues and events.

- There were views that the proposed HKPM should be managed by professional and local Hong Kong residents and the operation should be managed as an independent, non-profit and self-sufficient organisation.

WKCD's Response

The proposed HKPM is not a branch museum of the Palace Museum, and will be operated and managed by WKCD with its own professional staff and as an arts and cultural facility of WKCD. WKCD will be responsible for the planning, construction and curatorial matters, as well as the management and day-to-day operation of the proposed HKPM.

Similar to the governance structure for M+, WKCD plans to set up a wholly-owned subsidiary company under the WKCD Board, with a museum board governing the new HKPM. The museum board will comprise members of the WKCD Board, and people with relevant expertise and experience from a diverse background, representatives from the WKCD Management and the Government of HKSAR, as well as experts from the Palace Museum.

The establishment of a wholly-owned subsidiary company will create a clearer identity for the proposed HKPM as a cultural institution, ensure the governance structure has sufficient professional expertise on museological matters and enhance the confidence of the public and donors. WKCDA will set overall policies for the governance and oversee business and corporate plans of the proposed HKPM.

As preparatory work for the proposed HKPM has just started and the project is still in the design stage, WKCDA will take into account the views collected in the consultation exercise in formulating the operational details of the proposed HKPM. Taking into account the historical and artistic value of the collections of the Palace Museum and its successful experience in developing cultural and creative products, we anticipate that the proposed HKPM will become a popular destination for visitors.