

**For discussion  
on 25 May 2020**

**Legislative Council  
Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services**

**Additional courtrooms and associated facilities  
at lower ground fourth floor in the High Court Building**

**PURPOSE**

This paper seeks Members' support to the Judiciary's major works project for the construction of additional courtrooms and associated facilities on the lower ground fourth floor (LG4/F) of the High Court Building (HCB) to meet operational needs of the courts.

**PROBLEM**

2. There is a problem of shortage of courtrooms and associated facilities in the High Court. Additional courtrooms and associated facilities are required in order to alleviate the problem, and to facilitate greater efficiency in deployment of judicial resources.

**PROPOSAL**

3. The Judiciary, with the support of the Architectural Services Department, proposes to construct the following additional facilities on the LG4/F in the HCB –

- (a) six civil courtrooms (size ranging from 65 square metres (m<sup>2</sup>) to 100 m<sup>2</sup>);
- (b) five consultation rooms<sup>1</sup>;
- (c) a court lobby;
- (d) offices for staff providing support to Judges;
- (e) equipment rooms; and

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<sup>1</sup> There are currently three consultation rooms on LG4/F of the HCB.

- (f) ancillary facilities including an entrance hall, toilet facilities, an air-conditioning plant room, etc.

4. The total area of the proposed facilities is around 790 m<sup>2</sup>. The project will provide the basic infrastructure for courtrooms and associated facilities necessary for court operation, including audio-visual and digital sound recording systems, information technology and other electronic facilities, security system and devices. There will be separate accesses for public and restricted areas. Since there is already a baby-care room and toilet facilities for the disabled on the LG4/F of the HCB, additional provision is not required in this project. A site plan is at **Enclosure**.

Enclosure

## JUSTIFICATIONS

5. The HCB was built in 1984 and has been operating for over 35 years. At present, there are 46 courtrooms comprising –

- (a) 36 courtrooms, mostly of around 180 m<sup>2</sup> in size, for conducting court hearings of criminal and civil cases within the jurisdiction of the Court of Appeal and the Court of First Instance (CFI);
- (b) three civil courtrooms, ranging from 85 m<sup>2</sup> to 110 m<sup>2</sup>, for conducting court hearings of civil cases within the jurisdiction of the CFI; and
- (c) seven Masters' courtrooms of about 60 m<sup>2</sup> in size for hearing interlocutory and summary applications in chambers, and conducting assessments of damages and interpleader trials.

Besides courtrooms, the HCB also accommodates associated court facilities including Judges' chambers, consultation rooms, witness waiting rooms, court registries as well as other offices and ancillary facilities for support services and administrative staff.

6. Over the years, there is a shortage of courtrooms in the High Court. While the construction of three civil courtrooms in 2012 has alleviated the problem, the civil caseload particularly those related to appeal cases has continued to grow since then. In 2019, the total number of civil cases was 19 647, which was 12% higher than 17 495 in 2012 in

particular those related to substantive civil appeal cases (597 cases) was 111% more when compared with that in 2012 (283 cases).

7. With increasing caseload and complexity of cases, the existing 39 criminal/civil courtrooms in the High Court are grossly inadequate to meet existing and future court services requirements. The situation is unsatisfactory since this would impose constraints on the arrangements for court hearings and is not conducive to the efficient administration of justice. The shortage of courtrooms also poses limitations on the room for appointing additional Deputy Judges to help shorten the waiting time of court cases. This has added extra burden regarding the administering of the use of courtrooms and listing of cases for hearings in the High Court. The situation would be aggravated if the caseload and / or workload (which is outside the Judiciary's control) further increases in the coming years. The provision of additional civil courtrooms and associated facilities is much needed to cope with the increased caseload and workload as well as to facilitate greater efficiency in the deployment of judicial resources.

## **RELOCATION OF HIGH COURT LIBRARY**

8. Having regard to space and physical constraints of the HCB, ceiling height required of courtrooms, as well as court users' convenience, there is no alternative site in the HCB that is suitable for the construction of the proposed court facilities. In order to release the space required for construction of the additional courtrooms and associated facilities in the HCB, the High Court Library (HC Library) has to be relocated from the LG4/F of the HCB to the first floor of the High Block, Queensway Government Offices (QGO).

9. The relocation of the HC Library would not have significant effect on the existing level of services provided to library users. Being conveniently located at the QGO which is in close proximity to the HCB, the new HC Library will occupy an area of around 860 m<sup>2</sup>, which is 80 m<sup>2</sup> less than its existing area. Although the reduction of area and headroom upon relocation to QGO may affect the capacity of accommodating book collections, the Library will deploy more mobile shelving systems to achieve more efficient use of space.

10. To make way for the construction of additional courtrooms and associated facilities on the LG4/F of the HCB, the HC Library is expected to be able to be relocated to the QGO in the fourth quarter of 2020,

upon the provision of space at the QGO by the Government Property Agency. The accommodation at the QGO for the HC Library is a separate minor building works project under separate funding.<sup>2</sup>

## **LONG-TERM ACCOMMODATION NEEDS**

11. To meet the long-term accommodation needs of the High Court, the Judiciary plans to construct a new HCB with improved court facilities at Site 5 of the new Central Harbourfront (i.e. adjacent to the Legislative Council Complex). As the new High Court project is still at the initial planning stage, there is an imminent need to construct additional courtrooms and associated facilities in the existing HCB to meet operational needs of the High Court in the interim.

## **CONSULTATION**

12. We have consulted the Civil Court Users' Committee<sup>3</sup>, the Criminal Court Users' Committee<sup>2</sup>, The Hong Kong Bar Association and The Law Society of Hong Kong on the project. The two Committees and the two legal professional bodies generally support the project.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

13. The estimated cost of the project is \$109.1 million in money-of-the-day prices. The estimated annual recurrent expenditure arising from this project is \$1.7 million.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

14. Subject to Members' views, we plan to seek the endorsement of the Public Works Subcommittee of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and

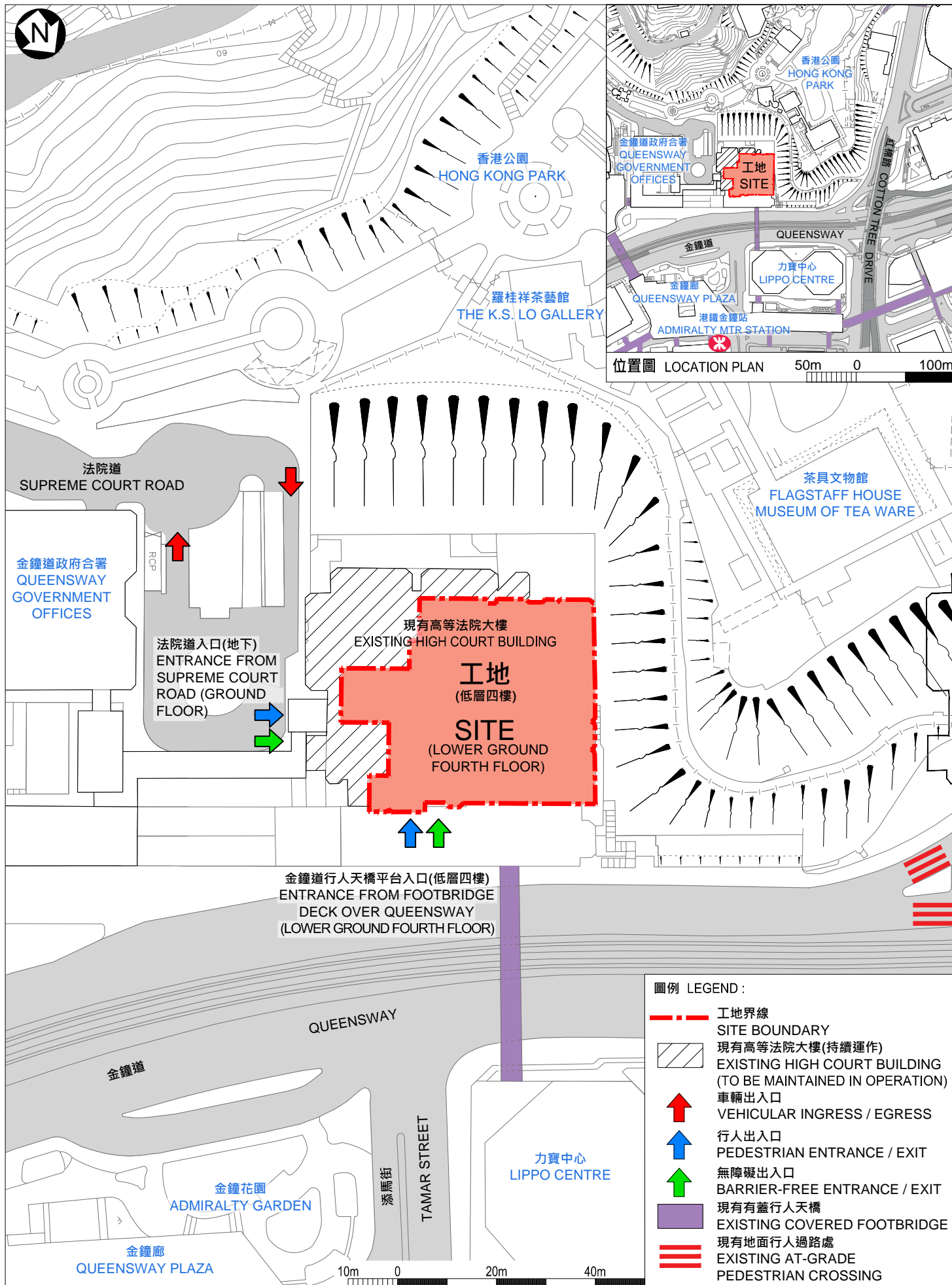
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2 The funding request is being considered by the Accommodation Strategy Group as a minor building works project.

3 The Civil Court Users' Committee and the Criminal Court Users' Committee are appointed by the Chief Justice and chaired by High Court Judges to discuss matters of concern to users of the civil and criminal courts respectively, including all matters of practice and procedure, and the administration of the courts. Members comprise judges, representatives of the legal profession, representatives of other court users and lay members.

the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) of the LegCo within the current legislative session. Subject to the FC's approval, the construction works are expected to commence in late 2020 for completion by phases in the third quarter of 2023.

**Judiciary Administration**  
**May 2020**



工地平面圖  
SITE PLAN

32LJ  
 高等法院大樓低層四樓增建法庭及相關設施  
 ADDITIONAL COURTROOMS AND ASSOCIATED FACILITIES AT  
 LOWER GROUND FOURTH FLOOR IN THE HIGH COURT BUILDING



ARCHITECTURAL  
 SERVICES  
 DEPARTMENT 建築署