

**MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**RESULTS OF THE ASSESSMENT OF
1,444 HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

PURPOSE

To report to Members the completion of the assessment of 1,444 historic buildings in Hong Kong with their respective proposed grading and seek Members' views on the way forward in light of the formal relationship between the administrative grading system and the statutory monument declaration system endorsed by Members and rising public aspirations about heritage conservation in Hong Kong.

BACKGROUND

2. A territory-wide survey on historic buildings in Hong Kong mainly built before 1950 was carried out by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) in 1996-2000. Some 8,800 buildings were recorded. A more in-depth survey of 1,444 buildings with higher heritage value selected from the 8,800 surveyed buildings was carried out by AMO in 2002-2004. As recommended by Members of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) at its meeting of 13 December 2004, an Expert Panel comprising historians and members of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, Hong Kong Institute of Planners and Hong Kong Institute of Engineers has been formed since March 2005 to undertake an in-depth assessment of the heritage value of these buildings. The composition of the Expert Panel is shown at Annex A.

3. A two-tier assessment approach is adopted for the assessment of these buildings, as endorsed by AAB Members at their meeting on 29 November 2005. All the buildings were first assessed at Stage 1 against six criteria, namely historical interest, architectural merit, group value, social value and local interest, authenticity and rarity. A copy of the Assessment Form with those criteria set out is at Annex B for Members' reference. The scores of all the buildings were reviewed at Stage 2 when a comparative rating of the buildings was carried out based on the following three parameters –

- (a) Historical - illustrating a particular historical development with a specific theme. The proposed historical themes are set out at Annex C;
- (b) Typological - being the key exemplars of particular building types and architectural styles. The proposed buildings types and architectural styles

are listed at **Annex D**; and

- (c) Contextual - building group able to reflect the development of a settlement/cluster, and its social, cultural and economic lives.

4. With the hard work of the Expert Panel, the Stage 1 Assessment was completed in July 2008 and Stage 2 in February 2009. The Expert Panel has given scores based on the set criteria for the assessment. The scope of their work focused on according scores to the historic buildings based on the Assessment Form and reviewing the rating based on the three parameters set out in paragraph 3 above. Their work does not include suggesting grading for these buildings.

5. The results of this most comprehensive assessment ever conducted of Hong Kong's historic buildings will provide a basis for reviewing the heritage value of the buildings. It will no doubt also generate considerable interest in the community.

VIEWS OF THE EXPERT PANEL

6. The current exercise took the Expert Panel nearly four years to complete. The Expert Panel has held 58 meetings and site visits running a total of over 2,000 hours, and has considered a total of about 3,000 pages of information and 14,500 photographs for the buildings. Despite these extensive efforts, the Expert Panel considers that there will still be limitations on the scope and extent of the exercise. For instance, in some cases, there were historic building owners who could not be contacted at the time of the survey or who refused to cooperate (e.g. refused request for access to the inside of the buildings), and that has posed difficulties to the work of the Expert Panel. Accordingly, there could be new information discovered in future, which may lead to new perspectives on the assessment of individual historic buildings. Nevertheless, the Expert Panel has made their best effort possible in carrying out the assessment based on the information on the buildings available to them at the time of the survey. Moreover, the evaluation of the heritage value of buildings is a continuous effort, and their heritage value can always be reassessed as new information on them comes to light.

7. The Expert Panel also considers that while the 2002-2004 survey and the assessment of this batch of 1,444 buildings should have covered most of the historic buildings that have a high heritage value and which warrant a grading evaluation by AAB, the survey and assessment may not be exhaustive. Newly identified historic buildings can always have their heritage value and grading assessed.

PROPOSED GRADING

8. As pointed out above, the Expert Panel focused on according scores to the historic buildings based on the Assessment Form and reviewing the scores on a comparative basis based on the three parameters set out in paragraph 3 above. Their work does not include suggesting grading for these buildings.

9. To follow up AAB Members' request at their meeting on 16 April 2008 for proposed grading to be put forward by AMO for consideration by AAB¹, AMO has proposed grading for them based on their heritage value for Members' consideration. The definitions of the grades are recapped below –

Grade I	Buildings of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible
Grade II	Buildings of special merit; efforts should be made to selectively preserve
Grade III	Buildings of some merit; preservation in some form would be desirable and alternative means could be considered if preservation is not practicable

The list of the buildings and grading proposed by AMO, together with their photographs are attached at **Annexes E and F** respectively. Some of these buildings have been graded by AAB in the past but they may be accorded a different grading following the Expert Panel's assessment. It should be noted that buildings contained in Annex E are arranged in order of their grading (i.e. Grade I, followed by Grade II, Grade III and no grading) and within the same grading, they are arranged in order of their respective scores.

10. A summary on the distribution of the proposed grading is set out below –

Grade	No. of Existing Graded Buildings	No. of Proposed Graded Buildings
I	122	212
II	204	366
III	217	576
Sub-total	543	1154
Not Graded	901	290
Total	1444	1444

11. It can be observed that under the above proposed grading, the total number of graded historic buildings has more than doubled (increased by about 112.5%), while the number of historic buildings under each grade will also increase.

12. It should be noted that AAB endorsed at its meeting on 26 November 2008 the establishment of a formal relationship between the statutory monument declaration system and the administrative grading system for historic buildings of AAB. Under the endorsed arrangements –

¹ There has been a voting procedure for Members to decide the grading for a historic building.

- (a) the list of Grade I buildings, defined as “buildings of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible” will be regarded as providing a pool of highly valuable heritage buildings for consideration by the Antiquities Authority as to whether some of these may have reached the “high threshold” of monuments to be put under statutory protection;
- (b) the Antiquities Authority is committed to actively considering each and every of the Grade I buildings for possible monument declaration. Given the resources required, the Authority will naturally have to prioritise the list of Grade I buildings for consideration, based on such factors as the buildings’ heritage significance, demolition risks, the owners’ and the public’s aspirations, and ownership of the buildings; and
- (c) the Commissioner for Heritage’s Office will take the initiative to inform private owners of Grade I buildings the status and historical significance of their buildings; their eligibility to apply for financial assistance from Government for maintenance of their buildings; the likely Government intervention in case the buildings are under demolition threat, such as proposed monument declaration by the Antiquities Authority in order to provide immediate protection to their buildings; and a willingness to discuss with the owners possible economic incentives for the preservation of their buildings on a case-by-case basis depending on the merits of each case.

13. It should be noted that such a linkage would not oblige the Antiquities Authority to declare all Grade I buildings as monuments. The building to be declared as a monument must reach the “high threshold”, and other factors will also need to be taken into account.

14. For Grade II and Grade III buildings, Government recognises the aspiration of the community to take appropriate actions to preserve them. We would take the view that the buildings should be preserved in such a way which is commensurate with the merits of the buildings concerned, and priority would be given to those with higher heritage value.

15. Moreover, in the light of the new measures on heritage conservation, the administrative grading system of AAB has been accorded new relevance or significance in that –

- (a) the Heritage Impact Assessment mechanism has imposed the requirement for assessing the impacts on historic/heritage sites and buildings (“heritage sites”) arising from the implementation of Government capital works projects so that conservation will be given due considerations. Like monuments and proposed monuments declared under the Ordinance, all graded historic buildings have been classified as “heritage sites” for the purpose;

- (b) the financial assistance scheme to private owners for maintenance has been extended from monuments only to also cover graded historic buildings. Buildings with higher heritage value (i.e. higher gradings) will be accorded higher priority for funding allocation; and
- (c) a number of Government-owned graded historic buildings have been included in the “Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme” for adaptive re-use through the operation of social enterprises by non-governmental organisations with funding support from Government. Whether and what changes can be made to the existing elements of the historic buildings in the revitalisation exercise would depend on the heritage value of the historic buildings concerned (i.e. the gradings accorded).

The newly graded historic buildings under the proposed grading will also be covered by the above heritage conservation measures.

WAY FORWARD

16. Given the large numbers of buildings involved, Members are invited to advise on how they think AAB should proceed to consider the proposed gradings based on the Expert Panel’s assessment. Members may also wish to consider whether members of the public, particularly those who have a stake in the building concerned, should be involved and if so, how. As pointed out by the Expert Panel, assessment of a building’s heritage value requires continuous efforts and the emergence of new information may affect the assessment. We believe that when the proposed grading results are published, some members of the public may like to lodge information aiming at convincing AAB to amend the grading. For instance, the descendants of a certain historic building owner may feel that their ancestor was associated with a historically significant event and hence the building should warrant a higher grading. In other cases, it may be just the opposite and the owners would argue for a lower grading for fear that a high grading will jeopardise their rights.

17. As a suggestion, we propose that AAB may wish to take note of the proposed gradings as a provisional basis for involving the public and release these for public to provide feedback before the Board proceeds to discuss and endorse the proposed gradings. Practically, this may take the form of AAB releasing the results via AMO’s web site for public access. If any member of the public could provide additional information and would like to have the proposed gradings of the buildings concerned reviewed, they could write to AMO, say within a period of four months. AAB will also invite District Councils to provide comments on the information on historic buildings within their districts. AMO will assess if the information submitted had been made known to the Expert Panel before and, if not, AMO will highlight this for AAB’s attention when the proposed gradings are subsequently presented to Members for discussion. As and when necessary, AMO may revert to the Expert Panel for review. Meanwhile, Members may also wish to consider whether they would like to

discuss the proposed gradings of the buildings in batches, and if so, how these should be organised, for example, by groups of grading (Grade I, Grade II and Grade III) or with reference to the historic themes.

ADVICE SOUGHT

18. Members' views are sought on the proposed way forward.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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