

Proposed Recovery Work for Block 4 at The Central Police Station Compound

PURPOSE

This Paper briefs Members of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) on the proposed plan for the recovery of the Married Inspectors' Quarters ("Block 4") at the Central Police Station (CPS) Compound, which partially collapsed on 29 May 2016. This Paper follows a submission on eight initial options for the recovery of Block 4 to the AAB on 8 September 2016 (Board Paper AAB/33/2015-16) and a subsequent submission on three shortlisted options for the recovery of Block 4 to the AAB on 7 September 2017 (Board Paper AAB/15/2017-18).

In this Paper, a narrative of the evaluation of the shortlisted options is set out, taking into consideration the views expressed by Members of the AAB. This is followed by a description of the principal considerations and the main features of the proposed recovery option. The AAB is invited to offer its views on the proposed recovery option.

BACKGROUND

Block 4 is one of 16 historic buildings in the CPS compound, which is formed by a cluster of three Declared Monuments, namely the former Central Police Station, Central Magistracy and Victoria Prison. First developed in the 1840s, the CPS compound has undergone many changes and structural extensions, demolitions and reconstructions. The aim of the Central Police Station Revitalisation Project is to open up the once-closed government site for public use, and a key aspect of the project is to revitalise these buildings to meet modern standards so that they can be used by the public safely. After revitalisation, a major part of the site was opened to the public in May 2018 while Block 4 has been kept safe under protective wrappings and propping.

EVALUATION OF THE RECOVERY OPTIONS

As noted in the previous submissions, eight initial recovery options covering a broad range of possible approaches were set out as the starting point for discussion in September 2016. These were (A) Restoration; (B) Reconstruction; (C) Adaptation; (D) Preservation; (E) Facade retention; (F) Facade and interior retention; (G) Total reconstruction; and (H) Demolition. The eight initial recovery options were then assessed based on three criteria, namely:

1. Engineering feasibility: whether an option is executable in a manner that is safe to the building, the site and people;
2. Heritage value: whether an option will result in insignificant or significant damage to the historic fabric of the building; and
3. Contextual value: whether an option is compatible with the intention of the revitalisation project.

From the assessment, three of the eight options met all the assessment criteria and were shortlisted for further consideration. They are restated below:

Option B: Reconstruction – Reconstruct the collapsed parts of the building by using modern materials and use the building for adaptive reuse. This option anticipates major strengthening works to be carried out, retention of the original floor area, spatial configuration and the intended uses as low-traffic venues (NGO spaces and retail shops).

Option C: Adaptation – Rebuild the collapsed part in a contemporary design with associated internal alterations throughout for adaptive reuse. This option anticipates substantial strengthening of the structure and provides flexibility for spatial reconfiguration of the interior without changing the footprint of the original building, hence allowing the use of the building for high-traffic public activities (such as visitor centre and exhibition spaces).

Option D: Preservation – Conserve the partially collapsed building as found, and keep the remaining standing parts of the building for adaptive reuse. This option anticipates the use of the extant building as originally planned before the partial collapse (as low-traffic NGO spaces and retail shops) and the footprint of the lost part will become a courtyard.

It was noted then that all three shortlisted options were acceptable approaches to the recovery of the building, although they have different emphasis on preservation of the heritage value, sustainability and practicality.

In the evaluation process of the shortlisted options, the Project Team has been in close liaison with government departments, namely, the Commissioner for Heritage's Office, Buildings Department and the Antiquities and Monuments Office. The findings of the independent review panel and the regulatory investigation on the possible causes of the partial collapse were also taken into reference.

In a review of the shortlisted options by the AAB at its regular meeting in September 2017, some Members expressed their support of Option B (Reconstruction) because the restored building would resemble the original building and be more compatible with the heritage site; it is located at a visible area and having the original look would be preferable; it is not preferred to have another new building. Some Members who preferred this option said modern materials should be used on structural works even though salvaged materials should be used on non-structural works. Some Members supported Option C (Adaptation) on the grounds that it would allow more flexible structural strengthening of the building, hence more flexible adaptive reuse, encouraging more community participation, higher level of sustainability and lower long-term cost on repair and maintenance; as long as it is compatible with the remaining part of the building, a distinguishable new part could serve as a case study for public education illustrating the interactive process and difficulties in preserving a historic building; offers an opportunity for a contemporary design by young architects. Some Members who preferred Option C in principle stated that whether the option was acceptable would depend on the final design. Some Members expressly stated that Option D (Preservation) was not preferred because the partial collapse was not

caused by a significant historical event that was worthy of commemoration. Based on the views expressed by the Members, the Chairman concluded that Option B and Option C were generally considered acceptable by the Members, whereas Option D was least supported. The Chairman also cautioned that Option B of reinstating the building to its appearance prior to the partial collapse might be considered as “fake” by some in the heritage conservation field.¹

The views of the AAB Members were largely reflective of the opinions expressed by the Members of the Advisory Committee, Heritage Working Group and Art Working Group of the Jockey Club CPS Limited (JCCPS), as well as opinions expressed by Members of the Central and Western District Council on the three shortlisted options.

Guided by the feedback, the Project Team embarked on further studies with a view to arriving at a design for a preferred recovery option. In the following section, the key features of options B and C are outlined and compared where possible against a set of principal considerations. In the process of comparison a proposed design with its key features is provided. Option D is not included in this discussion because it received relatively little support at the AAB meeting.

PRINCIPAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PROPOSED DESIGN

The following factors were taken as the principal considerations for the development of the proposed design:

- (A) Structural and building enhancement: the extent to which the extant portion and the new annex can be structurally enhanced to facilitate adaptive reuse;
- (B) Appearance: whether the new annex will be compatible with the extant portion and the rest of the site but without appearing as fake heritage, and;
- (C) Future use of the building: whether the recovered building can provide less or more value to the public.

A. Structural and building enhancement

Safety is the top consideration in planning for the recovery. As noted in the submission to the AAB in September 2017, for both Option B and Option C the extant portion will require structural strengthening with steel and reinforced concrete to allow the recovered building to be used safely by the public. For both Option B and Option C, approximately 8% of the extant portion will be required to be removed to facilitate safe construction and to provide a rectangular configuration that is structurally and architecturally more efficient.

For Option B, Block 4 is to be restored to the spatial configuration largely in line with the original layout, except for modifications approved by regulatory authorities for compliance with modern standards, prior to the partial collapse. It should be noted

¹ Antiquities Advisory Board; Board Minutes AAB/4/2017-18

that some of these modifications will in any case be adjusted because they have become invalid as a result of the partial collapse. In comparison, Option C allows improvements to be made to increase public accessibility to the building, which cannot be executed in Option B. These improvements consist of:

- a) Rationalising the circulation of the building by rearranging the core with services and lift to the centre of the building. This also allows more direct and convenient vertical transportation for the public with universal access;
- b) Relocating the toilets to the peripheral part of the building for more effective use of space, and;
- c) The verandahs of the extant portion, which were blocked with brick walls years ago to make space for quarters, will be opened up and replaced by glass window enclosure, which will function as a protective barrier to comply with the building safety and code requirements. As a result, alteration to the balustrade is minimised and the historic character is retained.

Bringing together the above benefits, the proposal allows the building to be used sustainably with usable floor spaces which are fully accessible by the public.

As noted in the last submission, there is a limited volume of salvaged materials which are on-site or stored off-site. As the salvaged materials will not meet the safety requirements for structural works, plans are being developed to use these materials for non-structural or decorative work. Pending engineering feasibility, the granite stones on the remaining section of the staircase can be reused on the new staircase in Block 4; the existing timber floor joists can be reused as floor boards in Block 4; subject to further government review on fire safety, existing timber can be reused wherever possible in the new stair; granite stones salvaged from Block 4 and other areas in the compound can be reused as floor slabs on the ground floor of Block 4 and external paving. An example of external paving is the construction of a terraced ramp outside the main entrance of Block 4 to create a new seating area for the visitors and enhance wheelchair access.

B. Appearance

Under Option B, the lost part of Block 4 is to be reconstructed using modern materials. As noted above, this approach may give rise to concern that the recovered building is “fake” heritage. Under Option C, the recovered building should readily inform the visitors that the new annex is a modern addition to replace a portion that was lost as the result of a collapse. A major consideration for this option is to respect the heritage site, and that the new annex should be compatible with, while clearly discernable from, the extant portion and the rest of the site. As such, a facade that is highly contemporary and very different from the original appearance is not appropriate.

In the proposed design, in order to maintain a high degree of compatibility between the new annex and the extant portion, the platform on which the building stands will be unaltered. The Chinese-style tiled roof will be extended from the extant portion to cover the new annex so that the old and new structures are clearly shown as one building. The windows and doors of the new annex will be opened along the same grid lines of the openings of the extant portion. The new annex will also have a brick facade as does the extant portion so that the two structures share very similar building

materials. Two decorative metal balconies, a key feature of Block 4, which were removed for storage after the partial collapse, will be reinstalled although strengthening will be required to ensure safety.

At the same time, visible yet modest design adjustments will be executed to differentiate the new annex from the extant portion. The facade of the new annex will be built with bricks made of materials of a lighter colour than the bricks of the extant portion, and the bricks will be oriented at an angle so that it is clear that the two structures were built at different times. The second-floor balcony facing the Parade Ground, which had been damaged many years ago, will be rebuilt with new materials to increase the transparency of the building, creating more possibilities for future activities. These adjustments will assist in differentiating the old and the new structures but emphasizing the linkages between the two.

The facade of the new annex will make strong references to the extant portion, including Character Defining Elements such as the layered rhythmic arches, balustrades, windows, shutters and balconies. These features have been carefully studied and interpreted in the new facade with functional considerations and contemporary expression.

An architect's rendering of the recovery design is attached in the Appendix as Image 1 and a rendering of the recovered Block 4 sitting in the heritage compound is attached as Image 2.

C. Future use of the building

As noted in the submission to the AAB on 7 September 2017, both Option B and Option C will require structural strengthening of the extant portion. A recovered Block 4 under Option B, though requiring structural enhancement, will keep the original configuration and can only be used for low-traffic activities such as offices and shops. In comparison, Option C allows for substantial strengthening of the structure and provides flexibility for spatial reconfiguration without changing the footprint of the original building, hence allowing the use of the building for public activities such as visitor centre and exhibition spaces.

As a prominent and highly visible building overlooking the Parade Ground and connected with Hollywood Road via the Pottinger Ramp, Block 4 is an ideal location for public activities, in terms of its ease of public access and the symbolic meaning of using a prominent historic building for public activities.

Under the proposed design, the ground floor of the new annex of Block 4 will be used as the Visitor Centre of Tai Kwun, to be relocated from the Barrack Block where it currently sits. Future visitors walking up from the Pottinger Ramp, one of the main and popular entrances, will have more direct access to the Visitor Centre where they can find site and programme information as well as assistance.

The spatial reconfiguration will also see the relocation of the Main Heritage Gallery on the ground floor of the extant portion, which is currently located at the Barrack Block. The Gallery, together with the adjacent Visitor Centre, will serve as the major venue for visitors to understand the rich heritage significance and the evolution of the

site. First floor and second floor of the new annex will be used for exhibition spaces, cultural and public functions, allowing for more community participation. The extant portion of these floors will be used for ancillary or support spaces for these exhibition and performance areas.

The views received from the art, heritage and culture communities over the last two years were supportive of the above proposition. The general feedback from the cultural groups has been that they would like to see more spaces for exhibitions and public activities, which will benefit more groups and a bigger audience. JCCPS will continue to engage the cultural communities and incorporate their views to fine-tune the usage arrangements for Block 4 along the line that the space will be used to support public activities and programmes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While the partial collapse of Block 4 was an unfortunate incident resulting in the loss of heritage value of a historic building, it also offered an opportunity for a discourse on how best to recover a damaged historic building in a heritage compound. Indeed it offered an opportunity for Hong Kong to look hard at the principles that should be employed, and their relative importance, for examining the various ways of recovery of damaged historic buildings and arriving at the most suitable solution. In this connection, the study of the recovery options for Block 4 may have provided valuable learning on conservation and revitalisation for our community.

In the quest for a recovery option over the last two years, we have studied the engineering feasibility, heritage value and contextual value of a broad range of possible recovery options and shortlisted three acceptable ones. We have further examined the shortlisted options according to their possibilities for future use and potential benefits to the community and the visual compatibility with the heritage site, while always bearing in mind that structural safety is the pre-condition of any selected proposal.

While both Options B and C are acceptable recovery options for extending the service life of Block 4, each have merits and shortcomings. The proposed design outlined in this Paper, being a hybrid solution of Option B and Option C, provides flexibility in structural enhancement and reconfiguration, enabling Block 4, located at a prominent location of the heritage compound, to be used as a medium scale venue for public activities befitting the ambience of the cultural hub, and benefitting a broad audience. It calls for building a new annex that is organically linked with, yet with a facade that is modestly discernable from, the extant portion. This will create a functionally and architecturally connected building that works as a whole. In addition, it will avoid creating a replica of the collapsed portion that may be seen as “fake” heritage and may have detrimental impact on the heritage fabric of the compound. To the contrary, it will create a new facade representing a modest contemporary expression of the building, one that will be respectful to and compatible with the historic context of the compound. This will provide a visual message to tell the story of the partial collapse and illustrate the challenges facing conservation and revitalisation projects.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club respectfully submits the above design proposal for the recovery of Block 4. The Club has been fully committed to the Central Police Station Revitalisation Project and remains committed to funding and leading the work for the recovery of the partially collapsed building.

Members of the AAB are invited to offer views on the proposed recovery option of Block 4.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club
September 2018

Appendix



Image one: Architect's rendering of the recovered Block 4



Image 2: Architect's rendering of the recovered Block 4 sitting in the Central Police Station compound