This subject paper is intended to be a research paper delving into different views and analyses from various sources. The views and analyses as contained in this paper are intended to stimulate public discussion and input to the planning process of the "HK2030 Study" and do not necessarily represent the views of the HKSARG.

WORKING PAPER NO. 9
BUILT HERITAGE PRESERVATION

INTRODUCTION

1. This paper aims to:-
   a. review the current issues on heritage preservation;
   b. examine the initiatives undertaken to address these issues; and
   c. identify possible scope for heritage preservation and examine its relevance to strategic planning.

BACKGROUND

2. Hong Kong has a long history which probably dates back to 6,000 years ago and possesses rich cultural heritage resources. SUSDEV 21 Study has defined heritage resources as those sites which contain archaeological, historical and religious value. Cultural heritage provides a means of knowing and interpreting social, cultural and economic changes and enhancing our understanding of the past. It also provides a focus for community identity, from which a sense of belonging to Hong Kong can be fostered among the community.

3. In recent years, more people are aware of the significance of heritage preservation. In the Chief Executive's 1999 Policy Address, he explicitly spelt out that:

   "It is important to rehabilitate and preserve unique buildings as this not only accords with our objective of sustainable development but also facilitates the retention of the inherent characteristics of different districts, and helps promote tourism. The concept of preserving our heritage should be incorporated into all projects for developing old areas.

4. The Commission on Strategic Development (CSD) also recognises the importance of "preservation of buildings, precincts and other features of historical and architectural significance" as an important attribute for Hong Kong to become Asia's World City.

5. As at 2 January 2001, there are a total of 72 monuments declared under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. A list of the declared monuments is at Annex A. Besides declared monuments, over 450 historical buildings have been accorded grading. The grading only reflects the historical value of the buildings, but provides no statutory protection.

REVIEW OF MAJOR ISSUES

6. The problems encountered in heritage preservation are multi-faceted, interwoven with issues like development pressure due to shortage of land, lack of adequate resources and expertise, inadequate compensation, lack of incentives and an integrated policy, etc. This paper will focus on the issues as identified in many articles written by academics interest groups and property owners relating to in-situ preservation of historical monuments and sites. Basically, there are a lot of commonalities in the planning approach to preserve the built monuments and the known archaeological sites. Nevertheless, only the former involves issues relating to post-restoration and active use of the buildings/site. This paper will therefore emphasize more on built monuments. A brief account of the major issues is highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Inadequate Compensation and Lack of Incentives

7. None of the 72 declared monuments is privately owned residential building in the urban area. This may reflect that the statutory protection afforded by the Ordinance cannot effectively cover the privately owned buildings. Declaration of a monument would limit the development potential of the property, however, the Ordinance has only very restrictive provisions for compensation. In order to avoid objection or even legal challenge, a policy to seek owner's consent before initiating the declaration process has been adopted. Given the lack of incentives, it is difficult to obtain consent from the owners.

8. The lack of incentive is fraught with the absence of planning measures to encourage heritage preservation. Currently, there is no mechanism for providing planning incentive, such as transfer of plot ratio, relaxation of control on the use of heritage buildings, etc. Financial incentives, such as tax rebate, reduction of land premium, etc. do not exist. This aspect will be further discussed in the light of overseas experience in paragraphs 19-20.
Limited Scope for Preservation

9. There have been a lot of discussions on the physical extent of heritage protection: heritage protection should not be limited to a monument/building itself, but be extended to the environs so to allow a comprehensive appreciation of the historical item. The compatibility of the monuments and the surroundings will have important implications on the streetscape. So far, no mechanism has been put forward to protect and control the environs of the historical buildings. This results in isolated historical buildings dispersing all over different places, with their aesthetic values diminished in an incompatible urban landscape.

Lack of Resources

10. Other problems include inadequate resources dedicated to heritage preservation. Heritage preservation is by no means a cheap exercise. The estimated cost of restoration of a historic building can reach millions, and the annual maintenance cost can also be substantial. Sole reliance on government funding may not be realistic. Funds from the private sector in the form of donation, contribution or trust may need to be examined. Built heritage is a rich asset for cultural heritage tourism, and good management and profitable use of the heritage buildings will generate income for the preservation works. Flexible and sustainable use of the heritage buildings will need to be explored.

Lack of an Integrated Conservation Policy

11. A dedicated heritage conservation policy needs to be put in place to provide a holistic framework for different bureaux and government departments in discharging their duties in relation to heritage preservation. Under a dedicated heritage policy, there would be better co-ordination and a comprehensive strategy for declaration of monuments, and the criteria of declaration need to be consistent and transparent.

NEW ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES

12. Initiatives have been taken by the Administration to bring the community and relevant bureaux and departments together to review the situation and to work out a comprehensive policy of heritage preservation. The Culture and Heritage Commission has been established in May 2000 for advising the Government on the policies as well as funding priorities on culture and arts. The key responsibility of the Commission is to formulate a set of principles and strategies to promote the long-term development of culture (including heritage) in Hong Kong. The Commission is tasked to:-

a. strengthen co-ordination among government departments and public bodies involved in heritage preservation, and
b. incorporate a cultural perspective, including heritage conservation, in town planning and urban renewal.

13. An inter-departmental committee chaired by the Secretary for Home Affairs has been set up to review the heritage policy and to seek improvements to the policy and legislative framework for heritage preservation. The Committee will identify measures to better achieve the objective of heritage preservation, and to consider what legislative policy changes are required. Other topics directly relevant to planning, like post-restoration use of declared monuments, and measures to ensure compatibility between heritage buildings and the development in their vicinity, will be explored by the Committee.

14. In line with the above objective, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) will implement the Government's urban renewal strategy. The strategy requires urban renewal to incorporate preservation of heritage buildings and the historical characteristics of older neighbourhood. The preserved heritage buildings should sustain compatible use and be a functional part of the community. For example, the proposed urban renewal projects with heritage preservation include Ma Tau Kok Quarantine Depot, Yau Ma Tei Cinema, and Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market.

15. Moreover, the Tourism Strategy Group and its Sub-group for Heritage and Culture set up by the Tourism Commission has, with input from relevant bureaux and departments, completed deliberations on issues concerning preservation of heritage sites for promoting heritage tourism. A report of such deliberations has been submitted as input to the review of the interdepartmental committee mentioned at paragraph 13.

16. Furthermore, Heritage Tourism Task Force has been set up in 1998 by the then Hong Kong Tourism Association (now renamed as Hong Kong Tourism Board) to formulate a strategy for promoting heritage tourism. The Task Force has identified the need to review the tourism potential of selected heritage sites, with a view to reusing and repackaging the historical buildings for tourism use. One of the initiatives is the study on 'Heritage Tourism Development Concept for the Yaumatei Theatre And The Surrounding Area'. The Task Force has also launched a series of products to promote heritage tourism, including heritage walks with audio-guide, issuing of information leaflet, etc.

17. To facilitate compiling a more comprehensive database of the heritage assets, the Antiquities and Monuments Office has completed a territory wide survey of historical buildings in Hong Kong. Out of about 8,000 pre-1950 buildings recorded, it is preliminarily estimated that about 1,200 are with considerable historical value. Assessment for these buildings will need to be undertaken to ascertain their preservation case. This will serve as a useful database for formulating a heritage preservation policy.

POSSIBLE SCOPE FOR HERITAGE PRESERVATION
International Experience

18. As mentioned in paragraphs 7 and 8, there is a lack of incentives to encourage heritage preservation. International experience of heritage preservation in Singapore, Sydney (New South Wales) and New York may offer insights into the planning related issues such as the provision of planning and financial incentives and the designation of heritage precincts. The concept of heritage precinct in Singapore and Sydney may provide inspiration to our approach to preservation.

Planning Incentives

19. Incentive to heritage preservation can be provided through planning instrument such as concessions, transfer of plot ratio and waiver of use or bulk requirements.

   a. Transfer of plot ratio means transfer of development potential of one site to another. In the City of Sydney, the potential floor space (development potential) from the listed heritage sites can be transferred to another site, and such transferred development potential can be sold. In New York City, development rights of landmarks can be transferred to another site.

   b. Planning concession is available in Singapore and New South Wales. In Singapore, concessions include waiving of car park provision, development charge, and car park deficiency charge. In New South Wales, concessions to building site ratio and parking provision are offered.

   c. Waiver of use/bulk requirements is available in New York City. Individual landmarks and buildings in historic districts are eligible for waiver of zoning restrictions, provisions regulating the use, and built form control.

Financial Incentives

20. Tax rebate and heritage valuation for land tax and local rates offer financial incentives. In New South Wales and New York, heritage valuation, i.e., valuation of the heritage buildings with restricted development potential can be adopted in assessing local rates and land tax. Tax rebate or reduction is available in New South Wales and New York. For the income generated from a heritage property, a rebate or reduction of tax can be applied for the expenses on maintenance.

Heritage Precinct

21. Preservation in the form of heritage precinct provides comprehensive protection to the heritage buildings, the environs and even the neighbourhood. This form of preservation will ensure the developments nearby are compatible with the historical characteristics of the precinct. Heritage precinct enhances the historical character of the area and the heritage buildings within it.

22. The Rocks in Sydney, Australia; Emerald Hill and Singapore River area in Singapore are some of the successful examples of preservation in the form of heritage precinct. Heritage precincts in both cities serve as a functioning integral part of the community, the heritage buildings house retail outlets, eateries/coffee shop, museums, galleries, and offices of community organisations. The flexible use of the heritage buildings brings life to the precinct and enhances the appeal of the heritage items.

23. The examples in Sydney and Singapore demonstrate that heritage precincts are valuable assets to cultural tourism, the heritage area in these two cities become major tourist attractions. With the tourist money and the income generated from the commercial use of the buildings, a rich source of revenue can be tapped for preservation works.

24. The examples in Sydney and Singapore share a common point in terms of institutional arrangement. A single authority is in charge of planning, development control, preservation, restoration, financial management and land management (including disposal site for conservation 'shophouses/traditional terrace in Singapore, and leasing land/building to suitable tenants for compatible uses in Sydney). Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority even takes up the role of co-ordinating and promoting tourism development, by organizing events and guided tours, etc. Both The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and the Urban Redevelopment Authority assume comprehensive planning, restoration and management roles.

Insights Gained From International Experience

25. International experience may suggest some directions for the enhancement of heritage preservation in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the local situation and the issues unique to our planning jurisdiction need to be thoroughly considered.

26. Introduction of planning and financial incentives offers a means to encourage protection of heritage buildings without draining the government purse by compensation. We should continue exploring the feasibility of these measures in Hong Kong.

27. Heritage preservation in the form of precinct or cluster not only enhances the overall historical appreciation of heritage items and the neighbourhood but also facilitates comprehensive control of land use and streetscape in the neighbourhood. Heritage precinct better facilitates promotion of tourism not only because it is more accessible than the dispersed historical buildings, but also because it is easier to provide tourist services, facilities and related infrastructure to a centralised area. Similarly, enhancement of linkage between the clusters will also be beneficial to the promotion of the heritage assets and heritage tourism.

28. The institutional arrangements in Sydney and Singapore suggest the importance of a holistic approach of heritage preservation. Well co-ordinated implementation of planning, restoration, land use/development/urban design control, and tourism promotion is the key to success. In Hong Kong, a number of government agencies are charged with the various tasks of heritage preservation. We need to look into what measures to be taken to ensure effective co-ordination among the stakeholders, or to
introduce new institutional arrangements for co-ordinated implementation.

STRATEGIC PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

29. To better achieve the objective of heritage preservation, we need to continue our commitment and take new initiatives at the strategic planning level as follows:

a. to incorporate the objective of heritage preservation in territorial and sub-regional planning studies and give due regards in the formulation of development strategies. Careful balance between development and heritage protection needs to be achieved in all planning proposals;

b. to work closely with the Antiquity and Monument Office to identify potential heritage precinct/cluster based on AMO's inventory; and to integrate the characteristics of these heritage items as a cluster, with complementary streetscape and enhancement of the broader area;

c. subject to the enactment of the Town Planning Bill, to explore what measures could be adopted in the Special Design Area to preserve the environs and the surroundings of the heritage items. Design guidelines and principles of development control will need to be formulated for the SDAs;

d. to examine sustainable and flexible use of heritage buildings. Active and compatible post-restoration use will add liveliness and functional meaning to the heritage buildings and the local areas. This will also open a new avenue to generate income for preservation work;

e. to take into account the tourism angle in the course of heritage preservation. The tourism planning framework proposed under the HK2030 Study has incorporated cultural heritage as a key element; and

f. to work closely with all the relevant bureaux and departments, the URA, the Culture and Heritage Commission, and the relevant advisory bodies. Heritage preservation cannot be achieved by government alone, public participation and partnership with private sector should be encouraged to bring about desirable outcome to parties involved.

Footnotes

1. Bringing the Vision to Life, CSD, paragraph. 3.34, February 2000

ATTACHMENTS

Annex A: List of Declared Monuments in Hong Kong

PLANNING DEPARTMENT
JANUARY 2002
DECLARED MONUMENTS
(as at 2 January, 2001)

SOURCES
ANTiquITIES AND MONUMENTS OFFICE
LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

PLAN REF. No. PSS / 00 / 201
DATE
FILE REF. No.
4/01

DECLARING MONUMENTS AS AT 2 JANUARY, 2001

1. Rock Carving at Big Worn Bay, Hong Kong
2. Declared Street Steps and Gas Lampos
3. Rock Carving at Shek Pik, Lamtak Island
4. Rock Carving on Po Toi Island
5. Rock Carving at Sai Fa Chau
6. Rock Carving on Lung Loi Island
7. Rock Inscriptions at Joe House Bay
8. Tung Chung Fort, Lamtak Island
9. Tung Lung Fort
10. Fan Lam Fort, Lamtak Island
11. Sam Tung Uk Village, Kowloon
12. Old District Office, North Point
13. Shaoy Yut Village, Sai Kung
14. Rock Carving at Cheung Chau
15. Tung Tau Temple, Cape Spear Bay
16. Rock Carving at Lung Loi Wan
17. Island House, Yuen Chau Island
18. Site of Chinese Customs Station, Ap Lei Chau
19. Man Lung Tong Anchorage Hall, Sai Wan, Yuen Long
20. Remain of Ancestral Kin, Wun Yut Village, Tai Po
21. Shek O Creek, Fan Ling, Lamtak Island
22. Tong Chong Battery, Lamtak Island
23. Man Uk Temple, Tai Po
24. Hong Kong Observatory
25. Old Stanley Police Station
26. The Exterior of the Old Vicothermal Plant
27. The Exterior of the Main Building, the University of Hong Kong
28. Rock Carving at Wing Chuk Hang
29. Old Tai Po Market Railway Station
30. Liu Man Shat Tong Ancestral Hall, Shing Shui Tsai
31. Old House, Po To Village, Kowloon
32. Tai Fu Tai, Shek Tiue, Yuen Long
33. Kam Lang Galle Tower, Tai Po
34. Wing Hau Temple, He Lek Rau, Yuen Long
35. Tai Po Uk, Hau Tung, Shing Shui Po
36. Field House, Canton Time Driveway, Central
37. Former French Mission Building, Battery Path Central
38. Lai Lei Hauskho House, Chai Wan
39. Old House, Wing Lok Village, Sha Tin
40. Old Wah Chai Post Office
41. Old Pathological Institute, Causeway Bay
42. White Cashier, Sheung Wan
43. Former Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower, Wansui