

INTERPRETATION STUDY ON THE SITE OF FORMER MOUNTAIN LODGE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS

FOR ANTIQUITIES AND MONUMENTS OFFICE,
LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT



Executive Summary

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The Oval Partnership

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Cover : Photo of Victoria Peak Garden
 (Source : Oval Feb 2009)

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Former Mountain Lodge (FML) at Victoria Peak was built between 1900 and 1902 as the summer residence of the Governors of Hong Kong. Following an extended period of vacancy and neglect during the war years and due to the state of disrepair, the main buildings and servant's quarters were completely pulled down in 1946 while the Gate Lodge was retained. In the 1970s the site was redeveloped and opened to the public as the Victoria Peak Garden with the Gate Lodge subsequently declared a monument in 1995.

Following an initial archaeological survey in 2007 and in response to rising concerns on heritage conservation and growing interest in cultural tourism, this study was commissioned by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department to examine the historical value of the site of the FML and its surrounding areas, formulate an interpretation strategy and propose interpretation plans.

1.2 Report Structure

The study basically comprises two reports, namely the 'Statement of Significance' (Part 1) and 'Study Report' (Part 2) concluding with an executive summary of the findings.

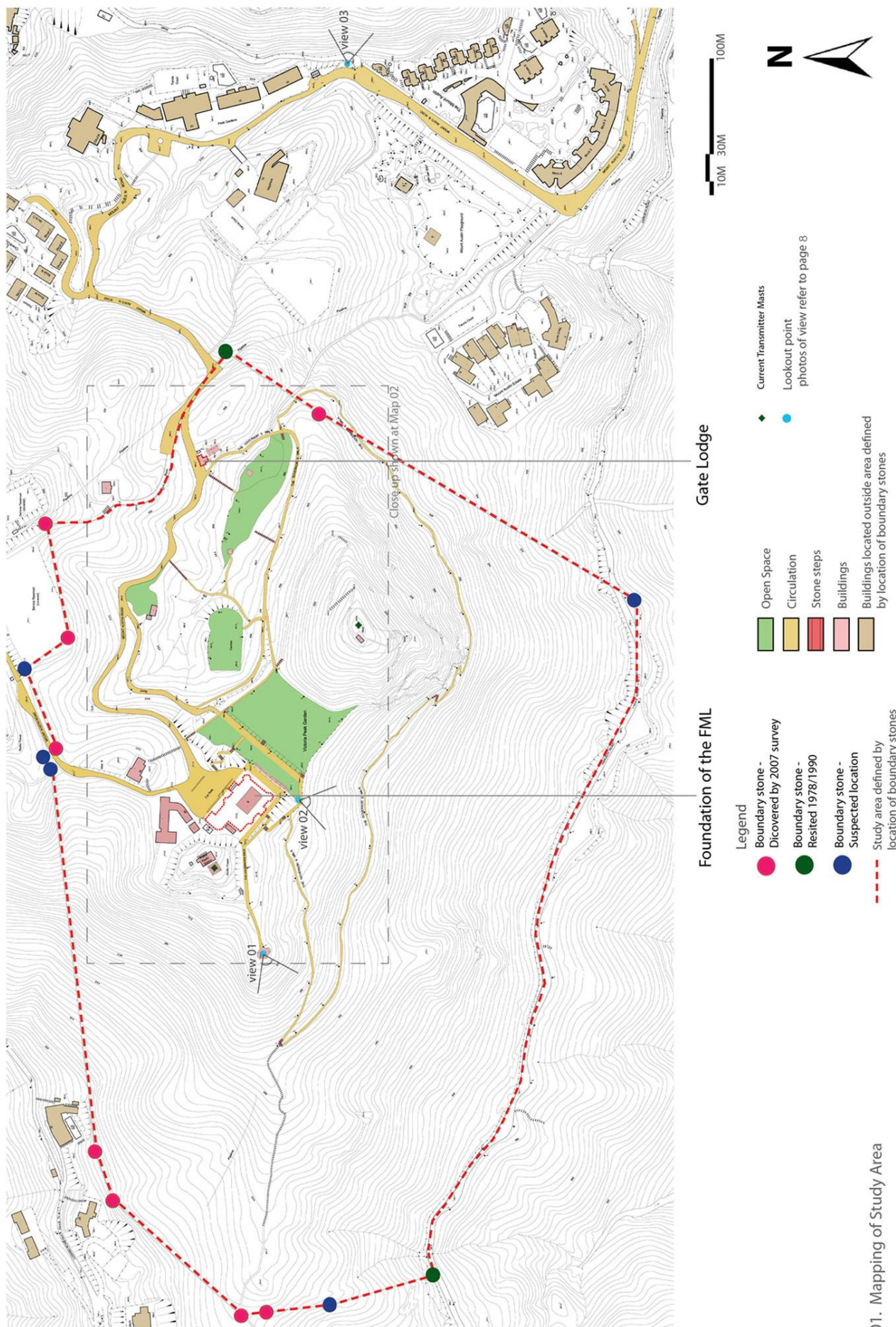
Part 1 - The 'Statement of Significance' assesses the existing site condition both in terms of the cultural significance of the tangible physical remains and intangible socio-cultural values identified within the study area.

Part 2 - The 'Study Report' examines long term development and future use of the site in formulating an interpretation strategy with three scheme options supported by an implementation plan.

1.3 Scope and Objectives

The study area referred to as 'the site of the FML and its surrounding areas' has two major points of reference. The first being the boundary marker stones that map the original extent of the FML site, and the second, being the wider study area enclosed by the 'Lugard Road and Harlech Road Round Walk'.

The objective of this study is to formulate an interpretation strategy and site interpretation plan to realize the potential of the site of the FML and its surrounding areas with respect to heritage conservation, education, cultural tourism and possible uses. While Part 1 of the study assesses the existing cultural heritage value with the identification of key "character-defining elements" (CDEs), Part 2, formulates a conservation plan and guidelines applicable to the future maintenance and development of the site. The study identifies 3 Scheme Options involving both conservation and adaptive re-use of existing remains and features in accordance with recognized guidelines and practices. Technical assessments address key aspects related to the feasibility and sustainability of the schemes together with an implementation plan incorporating the proposed Scheme Options.





Legend

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Foundation of Former Mountain Lodge | 7. Retaining wall | 17. Gate Lodge | Open Space |
| 2. Pavilion by the former Urban Council | 8. Zigzag Footpath Steps | 18. Terrace | Circulation |
| 3. Kiosk | 9. Circulation (Footpath) | 19. Garden (Lower Lawn) | Buildings / Features |
| 4. 40 Mount Austin Road | 10. Ruins of Mountain Lodge | 20. Rotunda | Foundation of FML |
| 5. Foundation of former servant quarter - site A | 11. Victoria Peak Garden (Upper Lawn) | 21. Gazebo | Stone steps |
| 6. Foundation of former servant quarter - site B | 12. Garden (Middle Lawn) | 22. Governor's Walk | |
| | 13. Radio tower | 23. Government Store | |
| | 14. 36 Mount Austin Road | | |
| | 15. Stone Steps | | |
| | 16. Circular Viewing Platform | | |

Map 02. Mapping of Existing Features and Artifacts



This diagram should be read together with Map 02. Mapping of Existing Features and Artifacts

* Symbol indicating Mappings not shown on Diagram

1. Foundation of Former Mountain Lodge
2. Pavilion by the former Urban Council
3. Kiosk
4. 40 Mount Austin Road
5. Foundation of former servant quarter - site A
6. Foundation of former servant quarter - site B
7. Retaining wall
8. Zigzag Footpath Steps

9. Circulation (Footpath)
10. Ruins of Mountain Lodge
11. Victoria Peak Garden(Upper Lawn)
12. * Garden (Middle Lawn)
13. Radio tower
14. * 36 Mount Austin Road
15. Stone Steps
16. Circular Viewing Platform

17. * Gate Lodge
18. * Terrace
19. * Garden(Lower Lawn)
20. * Rotunda
21. * Gazebo
22. Governor's Walk
23. * Government Store

Existing Site Condition - Isometric Diagram



01. view from circular viewing platform on the Governor's Walk (towards Western Hong Kong Island)

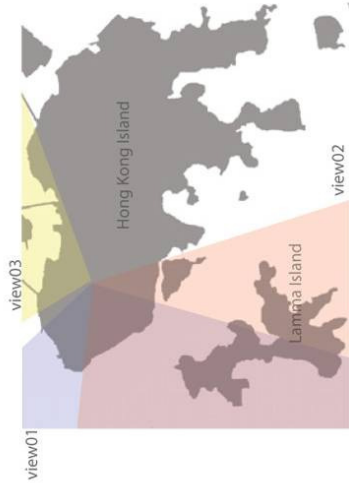


02. view from Former Mountain Lodge (towards Lamma Island)



03. view from viewing pavilion (towards Central)

Views from lookout points around FML



04. key map for lookout points around FML

2. Statement of Significance

2.1 Current Context

The site of the FML and surrounding areas in the context of Victoria Peak constitute a significant heritage cultural landscape, i.e., a combination and interplay of both built and natural heritage resources. The natural dramatic topography, panoramic views and fresh air were key factors influencing the decision to build the FML in this location. In turn, subsequent human settlement on the Peak including; construction of roads, gated luxury residences, service reservoirs, communication masts and forestry projects have all influenced the landscape that exists today. Moreover, tree planting has had a significant impact. The herculean efforts of the Botanical Garden staff in the late 1800s, turned the former ‘barren rock’ hillsides of Hong Kong into extensive areas of lush woodland, most of which are now protected as Country Parks.

The immediate environs of the Former Mountain Lodge and Victoria Peak Garden have not changed significantly since 1918 when the Governor Sir Henry May and his family used the lawns for tennis and the hillside paths for strolls in the fresh air. Disuse by subsequent Governors and gradual deterioration during the war years left the main building in state of disrepair leading to its eventual demolition in 1946. Revived as a public garden in the 1970s the area now provides a park-like setting with hillside paths shaded by the now mature woodland connect to a wider network of Country Parks and trails extending across Hong Kong Island. The physical setting is imposing. This area represents the highest accessible part of the Peak, which in itself makes it attractive to some visitors. Its location, isolated from the urban centre and major modes of public transport provides a rare and tranquil retreat from the urban centre of Hong Kong yet stands just minutes from the city centre.

2.2 Cultural Heritage Value & Significance

2.2.1 Architectural Value

The architectural value of the Mountain Lodge site is related to the architectural themes associated with the original buildings. Mountain Lodge was essentially a Victorian-period mansion (it was designed during the reign of Queen Victoria), modified with verandahs to better suit the subtropical climate, which is characteristic of British colonial architecture in India and the Far East. Stylistically, the lodge combines Scottish elements with then current Classically-inspired elements, creating a suitably robust design. It would be tempting to speculate that the architect responsible, from Palmer and Turner, was a Scot, but there is no evidence for this! The Gate Lodge, on the other hand, is a rather stoic structure, which is almost smothered with Classical references. It, too, suggests a robustness that could be more Scottish than English. The character-defining elements that best express the architectural themes are few, as the original lodge has been demolished. The physical remains, which include the underground archaeological remains of the lodge and the above-ground Gate Lodge, are the character-defining elements associated with the architectural value.

2.2.2 Contextual Value

The contextual value of the Mountain Lodge site is related to the contextual theme associated with the original setting. Mountain Lodge was sited in an exposed and prominent location within extensively landscaped grounds. The openness of the site offered residents a view of the surrounding scenery, while, at the same time, visitors were offered a view of Mountain Lodge as they approached the property from a considerable distance. In this regard, the associated character-defining elements include: the key views from the site; views of the site from its various approaches (paths, trails and roads); and features of the historical setting that reveal its original openness. However, the original setting factors little in the collective memory of the general public, as most people are not familiar with it. Instead, most people have acquired, through direct experience, a collective attachment to the modern-day Peak Garden setting. Given this, some of the familiar modern structures of the Peak Garden area, in addition to the open landscaping, are character-defining elements associated with the modern-day setting.

2.2.3 Landscape Value

The landscape value of the site of the FML and surrounding areas is significant. The original character of the Mountain Lodge landscape is still legible in the general topography, footpath circulation and distribution of vegetation types. That is, the site still enjoys the stunning panoramic views over Hong Kong and fresh breezes that inspired the choice of location for the Mountain Lodge. In addition to the scenery and fresh air, the lawns where the Governor's family and guests once played tennis and had picnics are now, in turn, enjoyed by the public. Some elements of the original hard landscape such as stone walls and culverts remain and provide a valuable insight into the craftsmanship and grandeur of design associated with the Mountain Lodge. However, the most significant and evident heritage landscape element at the former Mountain Lodge (FML) site and its surroundings is the legacy and foresight of 19th century foresters that transformed the once 'barren rock' landscape of the Peak into a lush woodland of diverse flora and fauna habitats.

2.2.4 Historical Value

The historical value of the Mountain Lodge site is related to historical (and not *historic*) happenings on the premises. As far as can be determined from research to date, no significant *historic* event occurred on the premises of Mountain Lodge (one that would warrant a detailed entry in the history of Hong Kong). Instead, the Mountain Lodge was built as a summer residence for the governor and his family - and their visitors, and the happenings that occurred on site appear to be primarily related to the ordinary events of daily life. Some of these events are recorded in historical photographs in the Public Records Office and other local archives, such as those showing the May family and their visitors (1912-1919). The character-defining elements associated with the May family's use of Mountain Lodge are extant features captured in the historical photographs. These include the physical remains of Mountain Lodge and its setting that are associated with the place as a residence. In addition, there are other physical remains in the general area that reflect the use of the site for other purposes, such as those related to the War Department and the Waterworks.

2.2.5 Social Value

The social value of the Mountain Lodge site is related to the collective memory of what it was before (the governor's summer residence) and the collective attachment to what it is today (a public garden). The associated character-defining elements related to the collective memory of the site as the governor's summer residence include the archaeological remains of the foundations, and the architectural remnants of the Gate Lodge, retaining walls and original landscape features. The associated character-defining elements related to the collective attachment to the present public garden include the pavilion and two pairs of stone lions, the familiar lookout point, lawns, and the access paths, trails and roads.

3. Interpretation Study

3.1 Premise of Study

Interpretation of the historical and social values and protection of the physical qualities of the natural landscape is highly recommended. It is the serenity of the site with its sweeping views, areas of lawn and walks that have attracted people in the past (including the governors) and continue to attract people today. Given this, the primary basis of approach is the conservation of the landscape and its associated views – and the removal or upgrading of inappropriate (and unnecessary) intrusions such as mismatched park furnishings, exposed services and aesthetically obtrusive utility structures.

3.2 Significance

The Peak has particular significance as a natural retreat on Hong Kong Island. It has a long and continuing history of providing residents and visitors with opportunities to enjoy the outdoors in a park-like setting with access to memorable views of sea lanes and the harbour. There are few places in Hong Kong where visitors can enjoy a series of lawns set within the context of mountains and sea views. This was the exclusive setting of the FML, which has remained intact in its essence and is now open to the public. The archeological remains associated with the FML, and the extant Gate Lodge, are therefore evidential elements in establishing the historic value of the place.

The FML has strong potential to be developed and used further for tourism and leisure use. It is robust, has strong cultural heritage values, is sufficiently large to attract and retain visitors and, significantly can appeal to a wide audience. Key features include:

- Architectural significance as an exclusive residential site with extant remains of former uses related to the unique colonial history of Hong Kong.
- Contextual significance as a scenic vantage point and strategic location for telecommunication structures.
- Landscape significance as an ecologically rich forested landscape with a diverse mix of flora and fauna.

- Historical significance related to the colonial history of Hong Kong and the lives of Hong Kong's governors.
- Social significance related to the social history of the Peak and the collective memory of the place as a public garden.

3.3 Conservation Plan

Protection of the *landscape value* and *contextual value* is seen as most important and should be given priority. It is the serenity of the site with its sweeping views, areas of lawn and walks that have attracted people in the past (including the governors) and continue to attract people today. Given this, the primary *basis of approach* is the conservation of the landscape and its associated views – and the removal or upgrading of any inappropriate (and unnecessary) intrusions.

Protection of the *architectural value* should also be given priority. It is the Gate Lodge, the *visible* foundations of Mountain Lodge and the former servant quarters that help reveal the original use of the site (coupled with the character-defining elements associated with landscape and contextual values).

The *vision* for the site is a carefully controlled and maintained landscape, in combination with remnants of architectural importance, that allows local and overseas visitors to (1) enjoy open spaces, green lawns, mountain walks, native plants, shrubs and trees – and unobstructed views of Hong Kong, while, at the same time, (2) understand the original context of Victoria Peak Garden. In doing so, the vision must acknowledge the *historical value* and contemporary *social value* of the site. The latter value, in particular, appears to be especially important since the 1970s, when the pavilion was constructed.

3.4 Interpretation Strategy and Site Interpretation

3.4.1 Interpretation Strategy

Given its significance, the site of the Former Mountain Lodge and site surrounding areas may be interpreted as both a natural heritage site and a cultural heritage site. Key significance is derived from its past use as the exclusive summer residence of the governors of Hong Kong, in particular Governor May and its present day use as a public recreation area for dog-walking, outdoor games, mountain walks and picnics.

The Interpretation Strategy is to capitalize on the heritage value of the site, to preserve the significance and unique qualities of the site while optimizing the public access, understanding and enjoyment of the area. Site Interpretation will capitalize on the extant remains and historical records related to the site. Proposed adaptive re-use of the remaining Gate Lodge into a small orientation centre will provide a glimpse into the history of the site and visitor orientation upon arrival. A series of discretely placed interpretation panels and directional signage along the walks and trails will help visitors develop an understanding of the place and the hidden history detailed in guide maps of the area.

3.4.2 Site Interpretation

Some stories could be effectively interpreted in-situ following along the routes of existing and potentially new trails. In particular the flora and fauna interpretation need be no more than simple name labels and descriptions of plants and species viewable in-situ with reference to their native origin, diversity and if appropriate history of introduction. The existing Peak trail already includes some information of this nature so coordination with AFCD will be required.

Site interpretation will need to strike a balance between site conservation and commercial intervention. Key policies that provide visitor access and value added services without undermining the character and atmosphere of the site are suggested for consideration:

- Tourism and visitation policy issues related to the type of visitor desired and construction/provision of services and facilities.
- Target visitor audiences should be compatible with the general policies and visitation outlined in the Conservation Plan. Marketing activities and in some cases de-marketing activities must be consistent with the overall themes. Marketing relates to promoting the core attributes of the site to its target audiences. De-marketing seeks to convey messages to others that they should not visit.
- Providing a quality experience that is compatible with the general policies and vision for the FML in a safe environment must drive facility and infrastructure development.
- Visitor safety must be considered. Safety of access includes ensuring pedestrians and vehicular passengers can access the FML site safely and easily.
- An opportunity exists to tell multiple stories about the FML and its surroundings. Clarity in objectives and presentation are essential to ensure that materials are presented in a manner that is compatible with the broad policies and vision of the FML.
- Collateral materials should be provided, especially to tourists and school children to assist with the interpretation and understanding of the significance of the site
- Multi-lingual materials and interactive presentations will assist with the effective delivery of the interesting story of the area.

3.5 Description of Proposed Development Schemes and Implementation Plan

3.5.1 Proposed Development Schemes

Development Schemes proposed in the study aim to capitalize on the identified tangible and intangible assets of the site. Three scheme options are considered ranging in scale and complexity. A common approach is applied to all three scheme options, firstly to preserve identified character defining elements, secondly to remove or upgrade inappropriate (and unnecessary) intrusions and thirdly to introduce elements that enhance the public understanding and enjoyment of the FML and its surrounding areas. The three scheme options range from a basic overhaul and ‘cleaning-up’ of the site with minimal intervention to a more comprehensive approach that seeks to optimize the tourist potential and appeal of the site to a wider audience. The latter includes a more extensive interpretation experience conveying historical information in a wide variety of media together with more commercial activities including dining facilities and event spaces.

The proposed Scheme Option 1 acts as a base scheme identifying the minimum recommended extent of intervention required to provide a meaningful visitor experience, while Scheme Options 2&3 build on the visitor experience designed to appeal to a wider and larger audience. Major components of the three schemes are introduced as follows:

Proposed Scheme Option 1

Proposed minimum intervention to include selective preservation, restoration, construction and maintenance of the following:

- 1.1. a. Preservation, restoration and repair of CDE’s including existing pavilion
(refer to SOS - Building Conservation Section)
- b. Display of existing mosaic floor tiles within the FML
- c. Reinstatement of stone lions at FML steps
- 1.2. a. Re-paving of the FML foundations
- b. Repaving of the FML deck
- c. Refurbishment of retained structures including kiosk and public toilets
- 1.3. a. Improved landscape lighting and park furniture
- b. Repair and upgrading of footpaths, steps & viewing platforms
- c. Removal of exposed concrete drainage channels and installation of sub-soil drains
- d. Repair and maintenance of retaining walls and structures
- e. Enhanced slope planting
- f. Establishment of an arboretum
- 1.4. a. Provision of an information centre (proposed at existing Gate Lodge)
- b. Provision of interpretation signage at strategic locations around the site

Proposed Scheme Option 2

Proposals as per Scheme Option 1 also to include:

- 2.1. a. Modification of the existing pavilion canopy
- 2.2. a. Reinstatement of the FML entrance lawn & associated landscaping
- 2.3. a. Enhanced slope planting adjacent to the FML
- 2.4. Long-term adaptation of structures at 40 Mount Austin Road to facilitate:
 - a. Provision of a new kiosk and public toilets
 - b. Provision of an interpretation centre
 - c. Provision of refreshment facilities including indoor and outdoor seating
 - d. Reconfigured car park & associated landscaping

Proposed Scheme Option 3

Proposals as per Scheme Options 1&2 to also to include:

- 3.1. a. Enlarged interpretation centre
 - b. Redesign of the Pavilion with event space
- 3.2. a. Reinstatement of the FML flagpole, viewing platform and steps
 - b. Provision of a shaded pedestrian route to the circular viewing platform
- 3.3. a. Enhancement of Trail interpretation, way finding and site ecology

3.5.2 Proposed Implementation Plan

The proposed Scheme Options imply an implementation sequence commencing with Scheme Option 1 followed by Scheme Options 2 and 3 subject to review and public feedback. The proposed Implementation Plan covers three levels of intervention designed to progressively enhance the site as a public recreation area and tourist attraction. Components of the three scheme options are summarized as follows:

Preservation of identified character-defining elements forms the basis of all three schemes 1, 2 and 3, as a means of protecting and showcasing artifacts throughout the site. Immediate implementation is recommended for consideration.

- Retain the significant heritage landscape features such as original stone walls, staircases and drainage channels.
- Remove / upgrade uncoordinated landscape furniture and replace with furniture of sympathetic, simple and coordinated design.
- Interpret the legacy of forestation work by the Botanical Garden staff in the 1800s that transformed the Peak landscape by establishing a woodland trail / arboretum to identify the different species in the surrounding woodland habitats.
- Continue good forestry practice by supplementing the mature woodland now with new tree planting for enjoyment of future generations if necessary.

Restoration of the site in terms of the removal of elements identified as visually detrimental or obtrusive are recommended in Scheme Option 2. Enhancement of the site in terms of facilities and attractions that promote public accessibility and tourism potential are recommended in Scheme Options 2 & 3.

4. Conclusion

The Study (i) provides an understanding of the history of the place, including both its built components, landscape components and social context as a cultural asset; (ii) assesses the built and natural heritage of the place, and identifies and explains the major heritage and socio-economic values associated with it; (iii) provides an interpretation strategy for the place and sets out an interpretation plan; (iv) provides a Conservation Plan; (v) technically assesses three development schemes as to their feasibility, sustainability and tourism potential and (vi) draws up an implementation plan that incorporates all the proposed development schemes.

The Study recommended a list of ideas with an aim to enhance the FML site for consideration of various stakeholders and building consensus. The following are considered as constraints of the FML site and key issues to be addressed:

- Tangible assets related to the FML are limited, but intangible values are strong. It is evocative of the colonial period in Hong Kong, as well as contemporary leisure use of the Peak.
- The area has undergone various stages of improvement. Compatibility of existing and future development options should be addressed.
- Visitation potential should be balanced against the fact that this area is predominantly a quiet residential neighbourhood with a number of exclusive developments. Assessment of potential impacts associated with enhanced tourism appeal and visitation should be considered.
- Access to the FML site is restricted to a single lane access road with passing places and in general no pavement for pedestrians. The safety of pedestrian using this access road together with the potential increase in traffic due to its tourism potential should be assessed.
- Additional directional signs leading to the FML site and signage at strategic locations should be considered.

List of Plans

1. Map 01. Mapping of Study Area (Oval)
2. Map 02. Mapping of Existing Features and Artifacts (Oval)
3. Existing Site Condition – Isometric Diagram (Oval)
4. Views from lookout points around FML
 01. View from circular viewing platform on Governor's Walk (towards Western Hong Kong Island)
 02. View from Former Mountain Lodge (towards Lamma Island)
 03. View from viewing pavilion (towards Central)
 04. Key map of lookout points around Former Mountain Lodge

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Architectural Consultant

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Landscape Consultant

Dr. Ken Nicolson (KN)

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Dr. Lynne DiStefano (LDS)

Dr. Lee Ho Yin (LHY)

Exhibition Design Consultant

MET Studio Design Ltd. (MET)