

5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The conclusions and recommendations in this section are based on the history and significance examined in the previous sections of this report. The general conclusions can be summarised as follows:

- ◇ The buildings are of a high architectural quality and are exemplars of the beginning of modern office design in Hong Kong and of 1950s architecture generally.
- ◇ The Central Wing is the best piece of architecture of the group and the East Wing is also a good piece of architecture. The more functionalist West Wing is the least good piece of architectural design out of the three.
- ◇ The exteriors of all three buildings have been altered over the years with additional storeys and changed finishes. However, the basic architectural concepts have not been damaged by these changes.
- ◇ There is little of high significance surviving internally. The buildings were built as offices which were intended to be flexible and capable of alteration. In this respect the buildings have performed well and have been altered several times over. As a result the interiors are a variety of different styles and little of the original finishes remain.
- ◇ The site itself is arguably of higher significance than the buildings. This has been the seat of Government since the foundation of Hong Kong as an independent colony. This is the site of the earlier Government offices (demolished to allow the CGO to be constructed) and is closely related to Government House and to the Murray Building.
- ◇ The significance of the site is enhanced by the other adjacent buildings – the Cathedral, the Old French Mission Building and Government House.
- ◇ The potential significance of the site is further enhanced by the historic sites in the wider area; Hong Kong Park (the former site of the Military), Sheng Kung Hui (the site of the church) and the Central Police Station (the site of Law and Order). These sites, taken in conjunction, offer very interesting opportunities for the interpretation of the history of the development of Hong Kong.
- ◇ The low rise nature of the site and the open spaces and trees around the buildings are significant. The buildings, in conjunction with the surrounding sites (Government House Gardens, Botanical Gardens, Hong Kong Park, Battery Path and the Sheng Kung Hui site) make up a large, low rise, green area in the heart of this otherwise dense highly developed part of the city. Any new development should respect the low rise of the existing buildings and open space around them.
- ◇ It is suggested that there might be a case for making all the low rise and well planted area into a 'Special Protected Area' where the presumption would be against any significant redevelopment work.
- ◇ The buildings are well maintained and in good condition. They can continue to be used once the Government Office move out – though the standard of servicing in some areas will be low compared with a modern office block.

The conclusion that is drawn from these headline issues is that the Central Wing and East Wing should if possible be retained and should be internally altered to fit some appropriate new use. The West Wing may be demolished.

If the West Wing site is cleared any new development should either respect the footprint and height of the existing buildings or should be restricted to the western edge of the site where a more high rise development would be possible on the corner of Ice House Street and Queen's Road Central. This would comprise the area occupied by the 'foot' of the 'L' shape West Wing in this area.

It would be very desirable to open up the site to the level of public access that obtained before 1997 and to remove the modern security railings. If it is financially viable the formation of a new small public garden on the site would be very welcome.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the site is finding an appropriate new use for the remaining buildings. Any new use does need to be suitably 'serious' to show some respect for the previous use as one of the major seats of Government. To turn the spaces into low grade offices, a hotel or perhaps worse still housing would be a denial of the significance of the site and buildings.

It would also be very desirable to have a use that allowed some degree of public access into the spaces for interpretation and education purposes.

Given below are a series of 'recommendations' for the future of the building. These are deliberately framed as 'recommendations' but they could readily be converted to 'conservation policies' if it was desired to give guidance to any potential developers as to what can be done with the site and buildings in the future.

5.1 General Recommendations

5.1.1

Consideration should be given to creating a 'Special Protected Area' to acknowledge the well wooded spaces and low rise buildings in the Hong Kong Park, Botanic Gardens, Government House Gardens, the CGO site, the garden between the Cathedral and French Mission building, the Battery Path area and the Sheng Kung Hui site.

Purpose of the recommendation

One of the main reasons why the CGO are significant is because they are part of a large open green space made up of the above sites, which are within the centre of an urban area. A 'Special Protected Area' would be a tool which could be used to protect this area from inappropriate development. The area also encompasses several significant historic buildings that are Declared Monuments and which would also benefit from the retention of this open space. The designation of the area would recognise the importance of the individual historic buildings and also highlight the historic nature of Government Hill, as well as recognising the significance of the green space.

Protection of this sort will require an amendment of the relevant legislation in relation to preservation in Hong Kong. Reference could be made to similar legislation in the UK and other countries.

5.1.2

Consideration should be given to adding the Central and East Wings of CGO to the AMO's list of graded buildings.

Purpose of the recommendation

The CGO buildings represent an important part of the history of Hong Kong's government and are in a significant open setting. Grading should help to protect the significance of the building and maintain the open space. The gradings should relate to the Central and East Wings (and not to the West Wing) as these are the better pieces of architectural heritage.

A precedent has been set by the AMO in their proposals to Grade the 1962 City Hall at Grade I and the 1955-56 New Hall by the Cathedral at Grade II. These are both good examples of post-war architecture, as is the CGO.

5.1.3

Any proposals for redevelopment should take into account and respect the adjacent Declared Monuments.

Purpose of the recommendation

The historic buildings adjacent to the CGO (the Cathedral, Former French Mission Building and Government House) are recognised as being significant by their status as Declared Monuments. Development proposals for the CGO could adversely affect the significance of these buildings and their settings. Any proposals for development should respect the Declared Monuments' important status by giving them space and by incorporating coherent landscaping.

5.1.4

Should any of the buildings on site be proposed for demolition or major alteration a record of the building should be made prior to this happening.

Purpose of the recommendation

To allow future generations to understand better how the CGO buildings and the site have evolved over time a record of the building should be made. This should be comprised of a photographic survey, a measured survey of the exterior of the buildings and typical internal spaces. This record should be held by the AMO or an appropriate archive facility.

5.1.5

Sufficient historic interpretation of the site should be provided in any redevelopment.

Purpose of the recommendation

The site itself is highly significant having been the seat of government since the British colony was founded. The public and building users should be provided with adequate interpretation to understand the building/site history and significance. Possible locations for this could be the former press room in the Central Wing or the debating chamber in the New Annexe.

5.2 General Building Recommendations

5.2.1

The Central and East Wings should be retained and should be converted to some appropriate new use while the majority or the entire West Wing could be demolished.

Purpose of the recommendation

The CGO buildings are an interesting and relatively well preserved example of Functional architecture of the 1950s. The most interesting building architecturally is the Central Wing which embodies this style and demonstrates an attention to detail. The East Wing is also an interesting piece of architecture showing a transition from the beaux arts style to the functionalism of the Central Wing and includes some attractive details. The West Wing is the least interesting building being fairly utilitarian in nature. The West Wing is the least significant of the Wings and if any demolition is to be considered this would be the most acceptable building to demolish.

5.2.2

If the West Wing is demolished the part of the site that could be redeveloped is the west end on the corner of Ice House Street, with the new development occupying the area of the existing building that faces onto Ice House Street. Any new development of a building higher than the present West Wing should be contained at this west end of the site.

Purpose of the recommendation

It is desirable to maintain and enhance the open green nature of the CGO complex and surrounding area and therefore a tall building covering something similar to the current ground plan of the West Wing would have a negative impact on the current setting, blocking out light and overlooking Government House as well as the remaining Central and East Wings. Towards the west end of the site there is some capacity for a new building, given that this is at the very edge of the open area. The steep slope of the ground at this point also enables a new building to incorporate more floors with less impact on the surroundings.

5.2.3

There is no need for any immediate major intervention or repairs to keep the buildings in good condition.

Purpose of this recommendation

The buildings are generally in good structural order and have been well maintained and looked after. A few minor defects were seen during the survey, such as staining and minor cracks. These are generally being monitored with telltale markers. Other repairs have been carried out to a good standard. A maintenance regime seems to be in place which currently works well. The building could continue in its present use or something similar to it with only routine maintenance for a good number of years.

5.2.4

When deciding on the extent of any alterations to these buildings it is recommended that a thorough investigation of the building is made as part of the detailed planning process.

Purpose of the recommendation

This Historic and Architectural Appraisal is based on an initial survey of a part of the available documentation and limited site inspections. There is always more to learn about the history of any building and there is more to be learnt from detailed study of the building fabric, particularly where this can be coupled with some opening up and invasive examination of the fabric, and archaeological research. This Appraisal should be seen as the starting point for decision making and for future investigations and not as a document that contains all the answers. Further detailed recording of key features and spaces on a room-by-room basis should be undertaken; in particular the Recommendations given below for the individual buildings should be seen only as 'Headline' recommendations that give guidance on a general approach to the work on these buildings. More detailed recommendations should be formulated for each building as part of the design development of any scheme of repair and alteration.

5.2.5

Further investigation should be carried out into the construction of the buildings to determine the construction method, particularly with regard to the extent (if any) of pre-cast elements.

Purpose of the recommendation

The construction of the buildings is currently unclear as a result of the external redecoration, which has obscured many elements and the junctions between them. The construction method and extent of pre-cast elements may add to the significance of the buildings.

5.2.6

An inventory should be prepared identifying features of the buildings that are characteristic of its original appearance and use.

Purpose of the recommendation

This should be prepared to prevent loss of original features of the buildings, particularly items that can be easily removed that may be of significance in terms of the future interpretation of the site. This would include furniture, signage and other associated fixtures and fittings. To prevent 'over-retention' in this regard, the inventory could identify different categories that concentrate on what is needed for the long term appreciation of the site, and salvage only a specimen or a small number of items within each.

5.2.7

If demolished, elements of the West Wing should be salvaged for re-use elsewhere.

Purpose of the recommendation

There are sufficient elements of original or vintage fabric from both the external envelope and internal spaces of the West Wing that could be salvaged were it to be demolished. These include bronze entrance doors, granite cladding, original windows, marble cladding, demountable partitions and hardwood doorsets. Such items would be identified in the record survey to be made prior to any demolition.

5.3 Specific Building Recommendations

Exterior

5.3.1

An attempt should be made to return to the original finish of the exterior of the buildings.

Purpose of the recommendation

Several of the original features of the buildings have been lost or covered over. These include the natural render finish of the buildings that has been painted over, the slate covering to the Central Wing which has also been painted over and the mosaic tiled sections of the west end of the West Wing which have been rendered. This has changed the overall appearance of the buildings and it would be desirable to return them to their original appearance. How practical this is will need to be determined by tests on site to see if applied finishes can be removed.

5.3.2

The external appearance of the building in terms of massing, horizontal and vertical lines, spacing and rhythm of openings and pattern of glazing should be maintained.

Purpose of the recommendation

The appearance of the building with regard to the above is central to the original design concept, displaying a high degree of repetition that it is important to maintain. Any disruption of this would have a detrimental impact on the elevations and compromise their significance.

5.3.3

Unsympathetic services additions, such as the air conditioning units added to many of the windows on the three Wings, should be removed and replaced with more sympathetic, internal systems.

Purpose of the recommendation

Various accretions have been added to the building in a piecemeal fashion over the years. They are unattractive and intrusive. The horizontal and vertical lines of the building are interrupted which disrupts the overall pattern created by the linear elements. The buildings would benefit from the removal of these elements and therefore the return of the original design concept.

5.3.4

Top-floor extensions to all buildings could be removed.

Purpose of the recommendation

The upper floors of the Central and East Wings are later additions and, though added sympathetically, they do change the nature of the design - this is particularly obvious on the East Wing. These are relatively early alterations to the building and it could be argued a significant part of its history. Removal may also be regarded as uneconomic given the extent of the repair and reroofing necessary. However, if future development made the removal of the added storeys appropriate there would be no objection to this.

5.3.5

The steel-framed *Universal* type glazing system should be retained throughout the buildings, or should be replaced with a sympathetic modern alternative which can replicate the pattern and thickness of the glazing bars.

Purpose of the recommendation

The type of glazing employed is a key feature of the buildings, with the same system employed throughout, albeit to a different pattern. Replacement with a markedly different system would erode the original character of the buildings. It may be desirable in any redevelopment to renew the glazing to double-glazing and to draughtproof windows to exclude the ingress of warm humid air. This will necessitate new glazing profiles, but care should be taken to replicate the balance of the original design.

5.3.6

Although later additions, the steel grilles to the 1st floor windows of the Central Wing should remain.

Purpose of the recommendation

The grilles match those to the ground floor, and are sympathetic to the original style of the building. They also provide an indication of the increased security measures implemented during the later history of the building.

5.3.7

The external signage on the buildings should be retained if possible.

Purpose of the recommendation

The signage adjacent to the main entrance to the buildings is very particular in its execution, with individual letters applied to the granite walls. Consideration should be given to retaining this, even when the government have moved out, perhaps through the addition of some pre-qualification, i.e. "Former Central Government Offices...etc".

5.3.8

The doorway within the entrance porch to the west elevation of the eastern granite clad section of the East Wing (see East Wing, Elevation 3) should be re-opened.

Purpose of the recommendation

This is one of the original access points into the building, leading into a reception area where some elements of original (or early) fabric remain, such as a reception desk. Re-opening of this would re-establish an original circulation route and bring the porch back into use .

5.3.9

The bronze entrance doors to the East and Central Wings should be retained in situ.

Purpose of the recommendation

The entrance doors are some of the few surviving elements of original fabric on the buildings, and are integral to the historic character of the buildings.

5.3.10

The modern steel panelled doors in the south elevation of the Central Wing should be replaced with more sympathetic examples.

Purpose of the recommendation

The doors detract from the external appearance of the building. Replacement hardwood doors should be inserted with reference to the original drawings.

Interior

5.3.11

Substantial internal alterations will be permitted to the buildings provided that these do not impact on the external elevations.

Purpose of the recommendation

There is little architectural detail left of interest in the interiors of the buildings. They have been altered internally in almost all areas with very little remaining of original fixtures, fittings and decorations. Many of the rooms have recently been or are in the process of being renovated. A considerable degree of internal alteration can be permitted provided the rhythm of the glazing is preserved. The limiting factor is likely to be the concrete trace.

5.3.12

The mechanical and electrical services in the buildings will need to be renewed. When stripping out the existing services attention should be paid to any of the services which may date from the 1960s and which are significant or otherwise of interest.

Purpose of the recommendation

It is unlikely that much (if anything) will survive of the mechanical and electrical services from the original build, although this is not impossible.

The historic services can be a significant part of the building's history. The individual features such as light fittings, switches, sockets, taps, sanitary ware, etc. should all be considered as items of potential interest when decisions are made about the extent of any alteration work.

5.3.13

Consideration should be given to the possible reinstatement of the original lift fronts and finishes to the lower ground and ground floor reception areas of the East Wing if any major refit is planned.

Purpose of the recommendation

The lift fronts are an integral part of the character of these areas, particularly that to the lower ground floor, which works in conjunction with the Art Deco-inspired external porch and entrance doors. Reinstatement of these, based on historic drawings and the extant originals to the upper floors, would restore these relationships.

5.3.14

The stainless steel security barriers to entrance lobbies should be removed.

Purpose of the recommendation

These are unsympathetic additions that detract from the original character and appearance of the space, which would have been more open and inclusive.

5.3.15

The East Wing staircase should be maintained in its present form and the original finishes conserved or reinstated where these have been removed.

Purpose of the recommendation

The staircase is one of the few spaces in the complex that is substantially original.

5.3.16

The demountable partitions to the East Wing with teak doorsets, vent grilles and acoustic back boxes should be retained, at least in some part as an exemplar. Consideration should be given to restoring a single office area of the buildings back to its original appearance for interpretation purposes.

Purpose of the recommendation

The partitions are an example of early finishes and of ventilation within the offices; these could be preserved in-situ or re-erected within a smaller area, together with ceiling heights, wall and floor finishes and furniture, presenting the opportunity to present a more complete area of early fabric and return it to its original appearance and configuration.

5.3.17

One of the conference rooms to the East wing should, if practicable, be maintained in its present form and the original finishes conserved or reinstated where these have been removed.

Purpose of the recommendation

The conference rooms are some of the few spaces in the complex that have substantial amounts of early fabric and are still used for their intended purpose. The Conference Room should, if possible, be a space that can be used for some public function such as interpretation of the buildings. Later and unsympathetic additions (such as the suspended ceilings) should be removed.

5.3.18

Consideration should be given to restoring elements of the Central Wing reception area and stair and lift lobbies to upper floors and removal of the more overtly modern interventions.

Purpose of the recommendation

Although later additions, the access stair to the reception and associated 1st floor lobby area should be preserved. These would provide public access to the Council Chamber.

5.3.19

The plaques in the Central Wing lobby should be preserved.

Purpose of the recommendation

These features are interesting and provide important information about the buildings which adds to the understanding of its history. Consideration should be given to repositioning them to a more conspicuous and accessible area, such as the flanking walls of the lifts.

5.3.20

The basement area of the Central Wing should be retained in its current condition, with the possibility of using this space for education and interpretation.

Purpose of the recommendation

The basement is an evocative space that would have been occupied during times of emergency. It will make an interesting interpretation space.

5.3.21

The Press Rooms to the Central Wing should be maintained in its present form and the original finishes conserved or reinstated where these have been removed.

Purpose of the recommendation

The Press Room is one of the few spaces in the complex to have substantial amounts of early fabric still in use for its intended purpose. It should be kept unaltered for possible use for interpretation purposes. Unsympathetic later additions should be removed.

5.3.22

The Central Wing south staircase should be maintained in its present form and the original finishes conserved or reinstated where these have been removed.

Purpose of the recommendation

The staircase is one of the few spaces in the complex that is substantially original. It should be kept unaltered.

5.3.23

The Central Wing Annexe reception area, upper floor lift lobbies and staircase should be preserved.

Purpose of the recommendation

Although later, the lobby is an impressive space, executed in a style that is sympathetic to the original building. The lift lobbies are similar in style, and the staircase is carefully detailed.

5.3.24

The Central Wing Annexe debating chamber should be preserved.

Purpose of the recommendation

The chamber is a suitable for use as an interpretation space. The decision whether to retain the space is dependent on the quality of the (uninspected) council chamber; a decision over the retention of one of these spaces should be made in the light of their possible use for interpretation and education.

5.4 Setting/Wider Context

5.4.1

The modern security railings around the site should be removed and where necessary replicas of the original lower railings should be reinstated. Full public access across the site and around the buildings should be restored.

Purpose of the recommendation

Before 1997, when the HKSAR government took over the use of the CGO, the site was open to the public. This provided an access route from Battery Path to Lower Albert Road and would have meant that the space at the top of Battery Path, currently used for car parking and as a vehicular access route into the CGO complex, would have been better used. It would be desirable to get the site reopened to the public as a way through from Battery Path to the Lower Albert Road.

5.4.2

There should be a presumption against the removal of any trees, especially those that are on the LCSD's Register of Old and Valuable Trees.

Purpose of the recommendation

The CGO complex is unusual in the busy urban environment of Hong Kong in that it has several areas of vegetation. It is also part of a wider green space stretching from the Sheng Kung Hui compound over to Hong Kong Park. This significant 'green lung' should be maintained and therefore no trees should be removed without good reason. The registered trees have been recognised as being significant because of their size, species and historic interest.

5.4.3

The historic buildings on Government Hill (the Cathedral, Government House, the French Mission Building and the CGO) are an interesting cultural group which should be preserved and interpreted.

Purpose of the recommendation

The grouping of the historic buildings around the CGO gives more significance to the CGO buildings themselves given their shared or linked functions. The East and Central Wings in particular are well integrated with the Cathedral and French Mission buildings being close physically but with the CGO building concealed behind a stretch of trees so as not to overwhelm the historic buildings.

5.4.4

A link should be made in the interpretation of the set of culturally significant sites in the area, the CGO site (in conjunction with the Government House), the Sheng Kung Hui site and the Central Police Headquarters and Victoria Gaol.

Purpose of the recommendation

These three sites represent Government, the Church and Law and Order. Their proximity and the survival of buildings of considerable historic interest gives more weight to the significance of all of these sites. It would be appropriate to make the public more aware of the cultural links between these sites through good co-ordinated interpretation.

5.4.5

The landscape around the CGO should blend in seamlessly to the sites around the Cathedral and the French Mission building. If the CGO site is opened up by the removal of the railings a redesign of the landscape would be beneficial.

Purpose of the recommendation

The CGO form an interesting cultural group with the adjacent historic buildings. To link these buildings together the landscaping should be co-ordinated between the different buildings. The most logical time to carry out any redesign would be when the railings around the CGO are removed.

5.4.6

Any new building on the site should take the height of the existing CGO as a maximum height.

Purpose of the recommendation

The height of the CGO buildings was discussed at length when the buildings were being designed in the 1950s. There was a clear intention to preserve the view from Government House. Whilst the view of the harbour has now disappeared, the view across the top of the offices and the former French Mission building is still significant. Other views from longer ranges, such as from the Hong Kong Park and the Peak, also benefit from the low rise of the CGO.

5.4.7

The open spaces on Government Hill around the CGO should be maintained.

Purpose of the recommendation

The combination of the low rise buildings and the open spaces with trees is of great significance given the general level of development in the surrounding areas. The CGO site needs to be seen in conjunction with the gardens of Government House, the Hong Kong Park, the Zoological and Botanical garden, and the trees on the Sheng Kung Hui site. This is a fine open space in the centre of an otherwise highly built up area.

5.4.8

The potential for archaeological remains should be considered if the site is redeveloped. Any remains or artefacts which are found should be recorded.

Purpose of the recommendation

The potential for archaeology on the site is low as it has been heavily excavated for car parks and basements. However, there may be some areas where there could be remains and these may be of some interest. Any features discovered should be carefully recorded.

5.4.9

The replica 17th century cannon behind the Central Wing should be left in-situ.

Purpose of the recommendation

Although not directly related to the history of the buildings or site they have become a familiar and important aspect of the landscape.

5.5 New Uses

5.5.1

Any new use should show respect for the previous function of the buildings as the seat of Government.

Purpose of the recommendation

One of the most difficult aspects of the site will be to find an appropriate new use for these buildings. The site and the buildings reflect over 150 years of Government history of Hong Kong. The buildings are most suited to the use for which they were originally intended as offices.

5.5.2

Should the West Wing be demolished, consideration should be given to redeveloping the whole or part of the area into a public garden.

Purpose of the recommendation

It is desirable to maintain and extend the current green spaces on and surrounding the CGO complex. The whole site of the West Wing could be converted into a public garden, however, financial pressures mean that part of the west end of the site will need to be redeveloped. The remaining space should be integrated into the potential pedestrian area linking Battery Path and Lower Albert Road. This will maintain and enhance the green spaces and create an enjoyable public area.

5.5.3

Following the HKSAR government's move to the Tamar site, the current zoning on the Outline Zoning Plan should be reconsidered and may need to be altered from 'Government, Institution or Community Use' to a more suitable category.

Purpose of the recommendation

Once the HKSAR government has moved off the site the zoning for government office use may be redundant and will need to be altered.

5.6 Management Policies

5.6.1

The current building management and maintenance system should be maintained while the HKSAR are still using the building and until some appropriate new use is found.

Purpose of the recommendation

The buildings are run and maintained by a team headed by the Building Manager. The buildings are in good condition and the current system seems to work well. It would be very undesirable to have this management and maintenance cease when Government moves out. The buildings should be maintained until their future is decided.

5.6.2

When Government move out of the CGO a management framework will be necessary for the site to ensure its appropriate development.

Purpose of the recommendation

Given the significance of the site it will be desirable to have more control over the proposed development than will be provided by the simple designation of the site and buildings. It may be desirable to maintain a close control over the development by setting up a management company or similar vehicle.

5.6.3

Building Management Guidelines

Depending on the level of retention, the establishment of Building Management Guidelines may be appropriate for treatment of more repetitive elements of the buildings such as the facades, office spaces and corridors. These have been explored in the UK in recent years, particularly in relation to large modern buildings with a high degree of repetition in terms of spaces and elements.

The basic model identifies an element or area of a building and considers the significant features that it may have, how this might be at risk from potential alterations and prescribes a number of potential alterations, each of which are graded according to their impact on the significance. This then allows the formulation of proposals for the building with a high degree of certainty as to their acceptability. Such a system can provide a framework to ensure that the significance and architectural integrity of the buildings are maintained into the future.

