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INTRODUCTION



Plan showing the study site in red, with adjacent Declared Monuments highlighted in blue (©Google 2009)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Report

The brief for this report states that the “*objective of the project is to conduct a thorough appraisal of the historical and architectural value of the Central Government Offices Complex*”. The Central Government Offices (CGO) are the principal government offices of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). These two 1950s buildings are located on a site that is important for its central location and association with some of the most significant heritage buildings in the region; Government House, St. John’s Cathedral and the former French Mission Building. At present new government offices are being constructed on the Tamar site at the waterfront. This will leave the CGO redundant and a new use for the buildings or the site will need to be found.

This Historic and Architectural Appraisal aims to investigate and understand the buildings through an assessment of its history and the reasons why it is significant. As well as looking at the buildings themselves, the report will discuss the immediate surrounding area and the site’s situation within the city in order to assess their importance within the wider context.

Following the assessment of history and significance, the report will discuss any issues which threaten the buildings and site. It will then provide some conclusions and recommendations to guide future decisions regarding the CGO Complex.

1.2 Authorship and Ownership

This report was commissioned by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) of the HKSAR Government. It has been prepared by Purcell Miller Tritton LLP (PMT) a specialist firm of conservation architects based in the UK. The completed report will be owned by the AMO.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The Study Site was identified in the brief as the CGO Complex, which includes the East Wing, Central Wing and West Wing of the CGO, plus the immediate surrounding area, comprised of the courtyard between the central and west wings, car parking areas and pathways to the north

and south of the buildings and the driveway to the north of the CGO which gives access from the area around the Cathedral. It also includes trees on the site and the landscaped areas.

The Study Site boundary is identified on the plan opposite in red. It is bounded by Lower Albert Road to the south, Garden Road and the Cathedral compound to the east, Queen’s Road Central and Battery Path to the north and Ice House Street to the west.

In order to place the CGO Complex in its context and discuss fully the impact that these buildings have on their surroundings, this report will also assess the wider surrounding area in terms of its historic development, the current build up of structures around the Study Site and the significance of the principal historic buildings/features in the vicinity. The historic buildings/features that will be discussed are Government House, St. John’s Cathedral, the Duddell Street Steps and Gas Lamps and the French Mission Building. These are identified on the adjacent plan in blue.

The history section of this report will look briefly at the establishment of Hong Kong as a British territory and its political history in order to put the CGO complex into context. It will also discuss the architectural history of Hong Kong. However, after considering the requirements of the report the pre-Colonial history of Hong Kong will not be discussed in any detail. The Bibliography section provides details of reference books relating to the history of Hong Kong should further detail be required.

1.4 Existing Information

To prepare this Historic and Architectural Appraisal visits were made to Hong Kong in February and March 2009. During the time in Hong Kong, several visits to the site were made to study the exteriors and interiors of the buildings and the landscape features. The visits included a photographic survey of the CGO. These buildings contain Government offices in full daily use and for this reason internal access was somewhat limited.

In addition, visits were made to several libraries, archives and Government departments to view books, architectural plans, photographs and archive documents. Below is a list of the places visited and a brief description of the sources viewed in each.

A full list of all the documents consulted is provided in the Bibliography in section 6.

- ◇ The Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO); historic plans, articles and reports, architectural plans
- ◇ The Public Records Office (PRO); Government Correspondence, architectural plans, historic photographs
- ◇ Hong Kong University Library (HKUL); Public Works Department Annual Reports, general architectural reference books
- ◇ Architectural Services Department (ASD); architectural plans
- ◇ Lands Department; historic and current aerial photographs of Hong Kong
- ◇ Hong Kong Public Library (HKPL); general reference books on architecture and the history of Hong Kong
- ◇ The Government Information Services Department (GIS); historic photographs
- ◇ The Hong Kong Museum of History's Resource Centre (HKMHRC); historic photographs
- ◇ The Geotechnical Engineering Office of Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD); Plans and correspondence relating to tunnels underneath the CGO site

Prior to the visit to Hong Kong, background research was carried out in libraries and archives in the UK. These are listed below and again a full list of the sources consulted is given in the Bibliography.

- ◇ The National Archives (NA); historic plans of Hong Kong
- ◇ The British Library (BL); general reference books on the architecture and history of Hong Kong

The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library (NNML); general reference books on the architecture and history of Hong Kong

1.5 Acknowledgements

In the course of compiling this report and while visiting some of the above institutions, help has been received from a number of individuals who are acknowledged below:

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AMO

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- ◇ Catherine Chan, Assistant Curator
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- ◇ R.G. Horsnell, Consultant

CGO Administration Wing

- ◇ Harris Liu

1.6 Gaps in Knowledge

Due to the nature of the CGO as a working government building, there were areas inside the buildings where access was restricted due to functions or the confidential nature of the work carried out there. In other areas access was permitted but photography was not. It is thought that a survey of the other floors in each wing has given a full enough overview of the condition and fabric of the building.

During the visit to Hong Kong the tower of St. John's Cathedral was covered in scaffolding due to cleaning and repainting as part of a planned maintenance programme. This restricted the view of the tower and made an assessment of how the cathedral relates to the CGO Complex more difficult. Photographs (and memoirs of previous visits) have been used to inform the description of the Cathedral tower and to view the tower in its context with the CGO.

1.7 Methodology

This report will be divided into six sections plus additional appendices. Each section of the report is described below:

1 Introduction

This sets out the basic information relating to the report, such as purpose of the report, existing information and gaps in knowledge.

2 Understanding

The purpose of this section is to analyse the existing information existing about the CGO Complex in order to gain an understanding of the site. It is broken down into three sections; statutory designations, detailed description and history.

3 Significance

This section will aim to set out in what ways the CGO Complex is significant. It will do this through an analysis of such themes as historic, architectural, landscape and setting, social importance and national importance.

4 Issues and Vulnerabilities

In this section a description of the issues which face the CGO Complex will be given.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This section will be a response to the 'Significance' and 'Issues' sections and will provide a series of conclusions and recommendations regarding how and why the CGO and its surroundings should be maintained and preserved or the scope for change to the site.

6 Bibliography

A list of all the primary and secondary sources consulted during the compilation of this report.

Appendices

These will include any additional information relevant to the CGO Complex which is too bulky to include in the main body of the report.

