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2 April 2024

Ms. HO Wing Yin, Winnie, JP
Secretary for Housing
Housing Bureau

By Email
shoffice@hb.gov.hk

Dear Ms. HO,

HKIA's Position on Wah Fu Estate Redevelopment

The Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) has carefully reviewed the plans and would like to share our comments and suggestions.

The Institute acknowledge the need for the Government to renew its public housing stock and understand the practical reasons for redeveloping the Wah Fu Estate due to dilapidation and poor maintenance. However, we believe it is crucial to retain and expand on the architectural and urban qualities that make Wah Fu Estate historically significant. We recommend that the Government consider manifesting and retaining the good design qualities of the original estate in the redevelopment. By carefully massing the new buildings along the sloping terrain and adapting the current standard public housing unit modules to the site context, it would be possible to preserve the "urban rooms" and the spirit of Wah Fu Estate in a contemporary way.

Moreover, we encourage the Government to engage various stakeholders, including residents, local communities, and schools, in the redevelopment process. This will ensure that their voices are heard and that the disruption to the neighborhood is minimized. Our detailed suggestions are attached in the Appendix below for your consideration.

We appreciate your attention to our comments and look forward to further discussions on this matter. Thank you for considering our perspective. Should there be any enquiries, please contact Mr. Nick KONG of the HKIA Secretariat at 3155 0407 or email to council@hkia.org.hk.

Yours Sincerely,

Benny CHAN Chak Bun, FHKIA, R.A.
President
The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

Cc: Ms. LINN Hon Ho, Bernadette, JP, Secretary for Development, Development Bureau sdev@devb.gov.hk

Encl.

HKIA Position on Wah Fu Estate Redevelopment

Background

Wah Fu Estate is a public housing estate built in 1967 designed by Ar. Donald Liao, the former Secretary for District Administration and former Secretary for Housing. Wah Fu Estate is a visionary public housing scheme that aims to reside 50,000 inhabitants in a once remote district in southern Hong Kong Island. Wah Fu Estate recalls the advancement and diversity of housing development of the past century.



Aerial View of Wah Fu Estate - Source: Wikipedia

1. Wah Fu Estate has architectural value in setting a historic precedent in estate design and public housing typology

Wah Fu Estate is a historic pride and establishes an example of the ongoing welfare policy and progressive approach of our city as well as the vision of household living environment implemented by the Hong Kong Housing Authority. Ar. Donald Liao designed the estate as a self-sustainable community, with ancillary facilities such as schools, libraries, communal podium, shopping arcades, markets and carparks, all incorporated within the housing estate. This forward-looking planning strategy with all-in-one amenities broke away from the previous housing schemes which are set in urban area, acted as the keystone of public housing development, and promoted urban growth.

The estate design also made smart use of the sloping terrain, such that many units enjoy brilliant sea views over Lamma Island and beyond. Also, its careful massing arrangement also created varied and well-proportioned “urban rooms” of parks, playgrounds, resting gardens and arcades, providing a quality living environment for

generations of Hong Kong citizens. In terms of building design, the twin-tower type of housing block was also first designed and built in Wah Fu Estate, which became a prototype adopted in subsequent housing estates. The courtyard brings in daylight and ventilation, as well as providing communal space and improving security by promoting overlooking of residents across the courtyard.

2. HKIA understands the need for the Government to renew its public housing stock

Understanding that Wah Fu Estate faces structural deterioration after six decades of serving the public, HKIA also recognises the need for the Estate to be demolished and redeveloped for practical reasons such as dilapidation and poor maintenance, so as to maintain a quality environment for the general public and upkeep the public housing stock, and to bring in improved architectural design ideas for the residents of Wah Fu, such as sustainability, better quality of living space, modern building services and the like.

3. Government may consider manifesting, retaining, and expanding on the good design qualities of the original Wah Fu Estate in the redevelopment

While Wah Fu Estate may have completed its historic mission, HKIA suggests that the Government may consider in its redevelopment design to suitably re-manifest and expand on the character-defining architectural and/or urban qualities of Wah Fu Estate as mentioned in the first paragraph (see Annex 1 for images). For example, by careful massing disposition along the slope terrain and adapting/modifying the current standard public housing unit modules to the site context, it would be possible to retain the “urban rooms” for the benefit of future generations, and retain the spirit of Wah Fu in a contemporary way.

4. HKIA supports Government’s efforts to preserve the residents’ memories of the original Estate during redevelopment

We encourage the Government to also archive or showcase the significant housing project in suitable locations/ venues for the public's interest. We appreciate HD’s efforts to create events and video records to conserve the historic and cultural elements of the Estate via the event “A Cultural Journey through Half-Century Wah Fu” (華富半世紀歷史文化之旅). We seek the HD to also consider the feasibility of conserving or adaptively reusing portions of the building block(s) that may be still in relatively better condition as a community space, for example, to preserve the heritage of our hometown (see Annex 2).

5. Consider engaging stakeholders in the redevelopment of Wah Fu Estate

Throughout the decades, Wah Fu has become a close-knit and thriving neighbourhood. We encourage the Housing Authority to involve various stakeholders of Wah Fu in its redevelopment process, no matter its last and present residents, or local communities such as schools, shop owners or the like, or to allow residents to be able to be relocated within the same district, so that the disruption to the neighbourhood would be minimal.

6. Plan and uphold suitable standards of room/unit sizes and unit mix for contemporary society

We would also encourage the Government to act as the beacon for society by setting the most suitable standards of contemporary quality of life. This could be a continual review on the standards of minimum living space per person and the unit size, and also that on the unit type mix, in which a balance between the larger and smaller units should be struck to provide the supply needed for families - and society - to sustain and thrive, instead of overly-providing smaller studio units to meet housing demand solely in quantity.

Annex 1 - Images showing good architectural qualities / character-defining elements of Wah Fu Estate that could be reinterpreted and re-manifested in future redevelopment design:



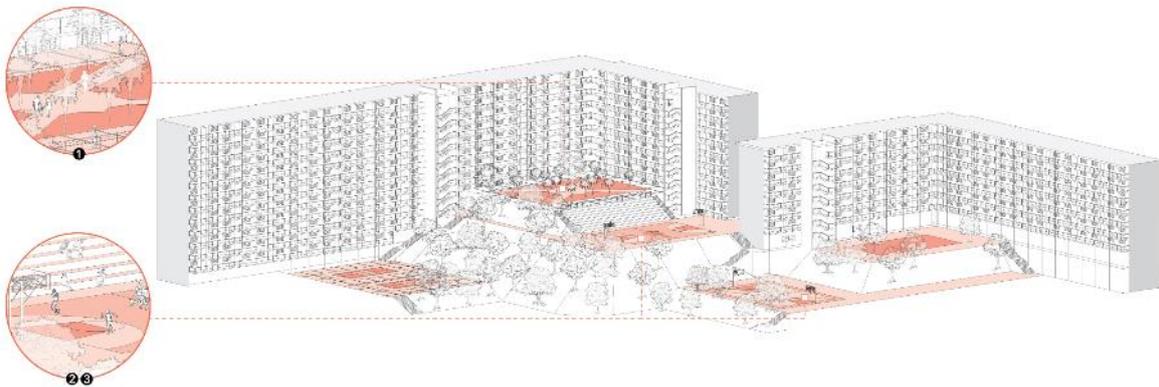
Well-placed building massing offering open views to harbour channel

(Source: HKU, Memory & Urban Space in Wah Fu Estate (website), <https://wahfuestate.hku.hk/accessibility-within-and-between/>)



Well-proportioned and spacious “urban rooms” formed by careful massing disposition

(Source: Wikiwand.com, Wah Fu Estate, accessed 16 January 2024
https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Wah_Fu_Estate#Media/File:Wah_Ching_House_outside_Badminton_Court_2021.jpg)



Terraced urban rooms of playgrounds and communal gardens

Source: (above) SCMP.com, "Once an icon of low-cost living, Wah Fu Estate is finally getting the redevelopment residents hoped for", 10 May 2014, <https://cdn.i-scmp.com/sites/default/files/2014/05/08/b9b0d987983d6ea8a96f9a8fb6e932a6.jpg>
(below): HKU, Memory & Urban Space in Wah Fu Estate (website), <https://wahfuestate.hku.hk/accessibility-within-and-between/>

Annex 2 - Design exploration of retaining portion of building block for future community
Winning Design Proposal “An extension to the Essence of Hong Kong Public Housing”
submitted by Ms. Irene Cheng for HKIA Young Architect Award 2017,

The YAA submission theme was "Michael Wright Memorial" and invited young architects to submit design proposals to honour and commemorate Mr Wright and to showcase his contribution to the Hong Kong general public.



Terraced urban rooms of playgrounds and communal gardens
Source: HIR Studio (website), <https://www.hir-studio.com/projects/michael-wright-memorial>

Bibliography

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HKIA Humanity Bank, "A Cultural Journey through Half-Century Wah Fu" (website) <https://humanitybank.hkia.net/a-cultural-journey-through-half-century-wah-fu/>, accessed 18 Aug 2023.

Irene Cheng / HIR Studio, Michael Wright Memorial (HKIA YAA 2017 Scheme), <https://www.hir-studio.com/projects/michael-wright-memorial>

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<https://wahfuestate.hku.hk/new-wah-fu-estate/>

Paul Zimmerman, opinion on redevelopment
<https://www.paulzimmerman.hk/planning/wah-fu-estate-redevelopment-consultation-paper-march-2016>

Housing Authority, redevelopment policy leaflet
https://www.housingauthority.gov.hk/en/common/pdf/about-us/publications-and-statistics/Leaflet_Eng_web03.pdf